EDEXCEL AS/A LEVEL HISTORY

*Active*Book included

endorsed for edexcel

Paper 1&2 Student Book:

Communist states in the 20th century

Steve Phillips | Ben Gregory | Nigel Bushnell | Rob Owen |
Series editor: Rosemary Rees

ALWAYS LEARNING

PEARSON

Published by Pearson Education Limited, 80 Strand, London, WC2R 0RL.

www.pearsonschoolsandfecolleges.co.uk

Copies of official specifications for all Edexcel qualifications may be found on the website: www.edexcel.com

Text © Pearson Education Limited 2015

Designed by Elizabeth Arnoux for Pearson

Typeset and illustrated by Phoenix Photosetting, Chatham, Kent

Produced by Out of House Publishing

Original illustrations © Pearson Education Limited 2015

Cover design by Malena Wilson-Max for Pearson

Cover photo/illustration © akg-images Ltd: VISIOARS

The rights of Nigel Bushnell, Ben Gregory, Rob Owen and Steve Phillips to be identified as authors of this work have been asserted by them in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

First published 2015

18 17 16 15

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 978 1 447 985273

Copyright notice

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form or by any means (including photocopying or storing it in any medium by electronic means and whether or not transiently or incidentally to some other use of this publication) without the written permission of the copyright owner, except in accordance with the provisions of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 or under the terms of a licence issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency, Saffron House, 6–10 Kirby Street, London EC1N 8TS (www.cla.co.uk). Applications for the copyright owner's written permission should be addressed to the publisher.

Printed in the UK by CPI

Websites

Pearson Education Limited is not responsible for the content of any external internet sites. It is essential for tutors to preview each website before using it in class so as to ensure that the URL is still accurate, relevant and appropriate. We suggest that tutors bookmark useful websites and consider enabling students to access them through the school/college intranet.

A note from the publisher

In order to ensure that this resource offers high-quality support for the associated Pearson qualification, it has been through a review process by the awarding body. This process confirms that; this resource fully covers the teaching and learning content of the specification or part of a specification at which it is aimed. It also confirms that it demonstrates an appropriate balance between the development of subject skills, knowledge and understanding, in addition to preparation for assessment.

Endorsement does not cover any guidance on assessment activities or processes (e.g. practice questions or advice on how to answer assessment questions), included in the resource nor does it prescribe any particular approach to the teaching or delivery of a related course.

While the publishers have made every attempt to ensure that advice on the qualification and its assessment is accurate, the official specification and associated assessment guidance materials are the only authoritative source of information and should always be referred to for definitive guidance.

Pearson examiners have not contributed to any sections in this resource relevant to examination papers for which they have responsibility.

Examiners will not use endorsed resources as a source of material for any assessment set by Pearson.

Endorsement of a resource does not mean that the resource is required to achieve this Pearson qualification, nor does it mean that it is the only suitable material available to support the qualification, and any resource lists produced by the awarding body shall include this and other appropriate resources.

Contents

How to use this book 4
Introduction: AS/A Level History 6

Russia 1917–91: from Lenin to Yeltsin 8

Introduction 8
Communist government in the USSR, 1917–85 10
Industrial and agricultural change, 1917–85 36
Control of the people, 1917–85 62
Social developments, 1917–85 88
What explains the fall of the USSR, c1985–91? 114
Preparing for your exams 139

Mao's China, 1949–76 166

Introduction 166
Establishing Communist rule, 1949–57 168
Agriculture and industry, 1949–65 192
The Cultural Revolution and its afermath, 1966–76 216
Social and cultural changes, 1949–76 240
Preparing for your exams 265

The German Democratic Republic, 1949–90 284

Introduction 284
Establishing and consolidating Communist rule in the GDR, c1949–61 286
The development of the East German state, 1961–85 310
Life in East Germany, 1949–85 334
Growing crises and the collapse of communist rule in the GDR, 1985–90 358
Preparing for your exams 383

Index 402
Acknowledgements 406

How to use this book

STRUCTURE

This book covers Route E of the Edexcel A Level and AS Level History qualifications. Route E consists of three papers which are linked by the theme '**Communist states in the 20th century**'.

- Paper 1: Russia 1917–91: from Lenin to Yeltsin
- Paper 2a: Mao's China, 1949–76
- Paper 2b: The German Democratic Republic, 1949–90

To take Route E, you must study Paper 1, plus **one** of the two Paper 2 options. You do not need to study the other Paper 2 topic for your exam, but you might like to read it for interest – it deals with similar themes to the topics you are studying.

If you are studying for A Level History, you will also need to study a Paper 3 option and produce coursework in order to complete your qualification. All Paper 3 options are covered by other textbooks in this series.

AS LEVEL OR A LEVEL?

This book is designed to support students studying both the Edexcel AS Level and A Level qualifications. The content required for both qualifications is identical, so all the material in the papers you are studying is relevant, whichever qualification you are aiming for.

The questions you will be asked in the exam differ for the two different qualifications, so we have included separate exam-style questions and exam preparation sections. If you are studying for an AS Level, you should use the exam-style questions and exam sections highlighted in blue. If you are studying for an A Level, you should use the exam-style questions and exam sections highlighted in green.

AS Level Exam-Style Question Section B

How accurate is it to say that the political system put in place by the Communists after 1949 was authoritarian rather than democratic? (20 marks)

Tip

Make it clear early on that you understand what the two terms mean. Do not just list your evidence; explain what made the various features either authoritarian or democratic.

A Level Exam-Style Question Section A

To what extent did Stalin's power over the Party change between 1928 and 1953? (20 marks)

Tip

Make sure you focus on the key word 'change'. Assess aspects that changed against aspects that stayed the same. Discuss the nature of the change, for example was the change fundamental, partial or superficial?

The 'Preparing for your exams' section at the end of each paper contains sample answers of different standards, with comments on how weaker answers could be improved. Make sure you look at the right section for the exam you are planning to take.

FEATURES

Extend your knowledge

These features contain additional information that will help you gain a deeper understanding of the topic. This could be a short biography of an important person, extra background information about an event, an alternative interpretation, or even a research idea that you could follow up. Information in these boxes is not essential to your exam success, but still provides insights of value.

EXTEND YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Lenin the dictator?

Historians have often pointed to the trend of Lenin centralising power in his own hands as evidence that he was a dictator. This view needs to be challenged in two respects. Firstly, Moscow found it extremely difficult to extend its full control to the most distant provinces where local officials continued to exercise power without too much central intervention. Secondly, recent research has shed a different light on the process of centralisation. While not denying the trend towards authoritarianism, historians such as Robert Service (1997) have drawn attention to the attitudes of local party members who, in the chaos of the early years of the regime, actively welcomed greater direction from above. During the civil war, local party members were desperate for support.

Knowledge check activities

These activities are designed to check that you have understood the material that you have just studied. They might also ask you questions about the sources and extracts in the section to check that you have studied and analysed them thoroughly.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

The consolidation of Bolshevik power

1 Make a list of the methods used by the Bolsheviks to deal with other political groups between 1917 and 1921.

2 Which of these methods do you think was the most important? Explain your answer.

3 Explain how the civil war influenced the nature of Bolshevik government established by 1921.

Summary activities

At the end of each chapter, you will find summary activities. These are tasks designed to help you think about the key topic you have just studied as a whole. They may involve selecting and organising key information or analysing how things changed over time. You might want to keep your answers to these questions safe – they are handy for revision.

ACTIVITY
SUMMARY

The economy

1 Make a table with three columns, one for the aspects listed below, one for success and the other for failure:

Land redistribution; collectivisation; the People's Communes; SOEs; water conservancy projects; backyard furnaces; the Lushan Conference of 1959; the Third Five-Year Plan.

For each of the eight aspects, put the strongest piece of evidence in support of seeing it as a success, and then for seeing it as a failure. Explain each choice.

2 In what ways did the Soviet experts make a positive contribution to China's economic progress?

3 Compile a list of examples from the period that show that political rather than economic considerations mattered more to Mao.

Thinking Historically activities

These activities are found throughout the book and are designed to develop your understanding of history, especially around the key concepts of evidence, interpretations, causation and change. Each activity is designed to challenge a conceptual barrier that might be holding you back. This is linked to a map of conceptual barriers developed by experts. You can look up the map and find out which barrier each activity challenges by downloading the conceptual map from this website: www.pearsonschools.co.uk/historyprogressionapproach.

conceptual map reference

THINKING HISTORICALLY Evidence (3b)

It depends on the question

When considering the usefulness of a piece of evidence, people often think about authenticity in the case of artefacts, reliability in the case of witness statements, or methodology and structure in the case of secondary accounts. A better historical approach to the usefulness of a piece of evidence would be to think about the statements that we can make about the past based on it. Different statements can be made with different degrees of certainty, depending on the evidence.

Work in small groups and answer the following.

1 Look at Source 10.

a) Write three statements that you can reasonably make about the First Five-Year Plan based solely on Source 10.

b) Which of the statements can be made with the greatest degree of certainty? Why is this? Which statement can be made with the smallest degree of certainty?

c) What else might you need to increase your confidence in your statements?

2 Source 10 shows an artefact (the tractor) and Source 11 is a witness statement. Which is more useful to the historian studying Soviet tractor production in the 1930s under the Five-Year Plans?

3 Look at Extract 1.

How would the historian have gone about constructing this piece? What kinds of evidence would they have needed?

Getting the most from your online ActiveBook

This book comes with three years' access to ActiveBook* – an online, digital version of your textbook. Follow the instructions printed on the inside front cover to start using your ActiveBook.

Your ActiveBook is the perfect way to personalise your learning as you progress through your AS/A Level History course. You can:

- access your content online, anytime, anywhere
- use the inbuilt highlighting and annotation tools to personalise the content and make it really relevant to you.

Highlight tool – use this to pick out key terms or topics so you are ready and prepared for revision.

Annotations tool – use this to add your own notes, for example links to your wider reading, such as websites or other files. Or, make a note to remind yourself about work that you need to do.

*For new purchases only. If the access code has already been revealed, it may no longer be valid. If you have bought this textbook secondhand, the code may already have been used by the first owner of the book.

Introduction AS/A Level History

WHY HISTORY MATTERS

History is about people and people are complex, fascinating, frustrating and a whole lot of other things besides. This is why history is probably the most comprehensive and certainly one of the most intriguing subjects there is. History can also be inspiring and alarming, heartening and disturbing, a story of progress and civilisation and of catastrophe and inhumanity.

History's importance goes beyond the subject's intrinsic interest and appeal. Our beliefs and actions, our cultures, institutions and ways of living, our languages and means of making sense of ourselves are all shaped by the past. If we want to fully understand ourselves now, and to understand our possible futures, we have no alternative but to think about history.

History is a discipline as well as a subject matter. Making sense of the past develops qualities of mind that are valuable to anyone who wants to seek the truth and think clearly and intelligently about the most interesting and challenging intellectual problem of all: other people. Learning history is learning a powerful way of knowing.

WHAT IS HISTORY?

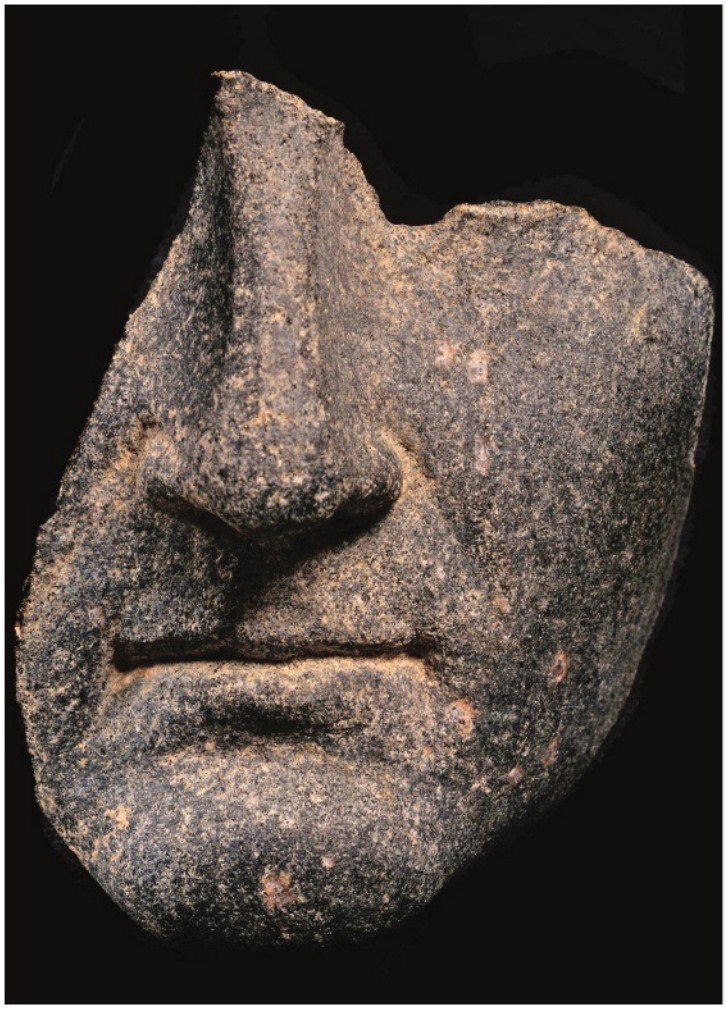


Figure 1 Fragment of a black granite statue possibly portraying the Roman politician Mark Antony.

History is a way of constructing knowledge about the world through research, interpretation, argument and debate.

Building historical knowledge involves identifying the traces of the past that exist in the present – in people's memories, in old documents, photographs and other remains, and in objects and artefacts ranging from bullets and lipsticks, to field systems and cities. Historians interrogate these traces and *ask questions* that transform traces into *sources of evidence* for knowledge claims about the past.

Historians aim to understand what happened in the past by *explaining why* things happened as they did. Explaining why involves trying to understand past people and their beliefs, intentions and actions. It also involves explaining the causes and evaluating the effects of large-scale changes in the past and exploring relationships between what people aimed to do, the contexts that shaped what was possible and the outcomes and consequences of actions.

Historians also aim to *understand change* in the past. People, states of affairs, ideas, movements and civilisations come into being in time, grow, develop, and ultimately decline and disappear. Historians aim to identify and compare change and continuity in the past, to measure the rate at which things change and to identify the types of change that take place. Change can be slow or sudden. It can also be understood as progressive or regressive – leading to the improvement or worsening of a situation or state of affairs. How things change and whether changes are changes for the better are two key issues that historians frequently debate.

Debate is the essence of history. Historians write arguments to support their knowledge claims and historians argue with each other to test and evaluate interpretations of the past. Historical knowledge itself changes and develops. On the one hand, new sources of knowledge and new methods of research cause *historical interpretations* to change. On the other hand, the questions that historians ask change with time and new questions produce new answers. Although the past is dead and gone, the interpretation of the past has a past, present and future.

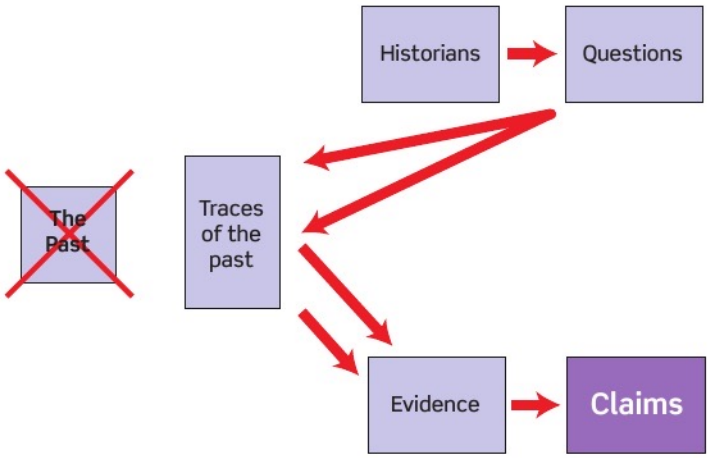


Figure 2 Constructing knowledge about the past.

THE CHALLENGES OF LEARNING HISTORY

Like all other Advanced Level subjects, A Level and AS Level history are difficult – that is why they are called 'advanced'. Your advanced level studies will build on knowledge and understanding of history that you developed at GCSE and at Key Stage 3 – ideas like 'historical sources', 'historical evidence' and 'cause', for example. You will need to do a lot of reading and writing to progress in history. Most importantly, you will need to do a lot of thinking, and thinking about your thinking. This book aims to support you in developing both your knowledge and your understanding.

History is challenging in many ways. On the one hand, it is challenging to build up the range and depth of knowledge that you need to understand the past at an advanced level. Learning about the past involves mastering new and unfamiliar concepts arising from the past itself (such as the Inquisition, Laudianism, *Volksgemeinschaft*) and building up levels of knowledge that are both detailed and well organised. This book covers the key content of the topics that you are studying for your examination and provides a number of features to help you build and organise what you know – for example, diagrams, timelines and definitions of key terms. You will need to help yourself too, of course, adding to your knowledge through further reading, building on the foundations provided by this book.

Another challenge is to develop understandings of the discipline of history. You will have to learn to think historically about evidence, cause, change and interpretations and also to write historically, in a way that develops clear and supported argument.

Historians think with evidence in ways that differ from how we often think in everyday life. In history, as Figure 2 shows, we cannot go and 'see for ourselves' because the past no longer exists. Neither can we normally rely on 'credible witnesses' to tell us 'the truth' about 'what happened'. People in the past did not write down 'the truth' for our benefit. They often had clear agendas when creating the traces that remain and, as often as not, did not themselves know 'the truth' about complex historical events.

A root of the word 'history' is the Latin word *historia*, one of whose meanings is 'enquiry' or 'finding out'. Learning history means learning to ask questions and interrogate traces, and then to reason about what the new knowledge you have gained means. This book draws on historical scholarship for its narrative and contents. It also draws on research on the nature of historical thinking and on the challenges that learning history can present for students. Throughout the book you will find 'Thinking Historically' activities designed to support the development of your thinking.

You will also find – as you would expect given the nature of history – that the book is full of questions. This book aims to help you build your understandings of the content, contexts and concepts that you will need to advance both your historical knowledge and your historical understanding, and to lay strong foundations for the future development of both.

QUOTES ABOUT HISTORY

'Historians are dangerous people. They are capable of upsetting everything. They must be directed.'

Nikita Khrushchev

'To be ignorant of what occurred before you were born is to remain forever a child. For what is the worth of human life, unless it is woven into the life of our ancestors by the records of history?'

Marcus Tullius Cicero

Russia 1917–91: from Lenin to Yeltsin

An overview

'Workers of the world unite, you have nothing to lose but your chains.' (Karl Marx, 1848)

To many of the workers living in societies that had experienced the **Industrial Revolution**, these words had the appeal of offering release from the grim living and working conditions in which they found themselves. The Bolshevik Revolution of **November 1917** seemed to offer the chance to change the world. The Bolsheviks were a political group devoted to the promotion of **Marx's ideas** of revolution in the name of the industrial workers. Their seizure of power in Russia signalled the possibility of overthrowing the rich, powerful classes who exploited the poor, replacing them with a system that put the workers' interests first. For many workers across Europe this provided an inspiration for the possibilities of the future, yet less than 75 years later the great Soviet experiment was over. The so-called workers' paradise, the **Soviet Union**, was dead. The story of the Soviet Union is one of enormous struggle to establish and safeguard a workers' state that, despite immense efforts, ultimately failed.

How was the Soviet Union established?

The Bolshevik Party, led by Vladimir Lenin, took power in November 1917 by means of an armed seizure of power in a well-executed *coup d'état*. The existing government, a provisional government that had taken over after the collapse of the **Tsarist regime** in March of the same year, was seriously undermined by the pressures of the First World War. Seizing power had been relatively easy for the Bolsheviks; holding on to it was to prove much more difficult.

By 1918 the Bolsheviks faced a civil war against a mixed association of groups known as the Whites. Lenin and the Bolshevik Party were forced to extend the areas of the economy they directed in order to supply the newly formed Red Army with the resources to win the civil war. This was achieved by 1921, but in the process the Bolsheviks alienated many of their own supporters. This situation

KEY TERMS

Industrial Revolution
The change from industry organised largely through small workshops of craftworkers to a system based on factory production using machines. This development, which was termed 'capitalism', occurred in Western Europe in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. It produced two new social classes: a middle class of factory and business owners and a working class of industrial labourers.

November 1917
The Bolshevik seizure of power is usually referred to as the October Revolution. At that time Russia used the older Julian Calendar, which was 13 days behind the Gregorian Calendar used in Western Europe. Thus, according to the Gregorian Calendar the October Revolution took place in November. Dates up to 1918 throughout the book are 'Julian' dates.

Marx's ideas
Karl Marx (1818–83) was a German philosopher who believed that the industrial workers should seize power from the people who owned factories, businesses and land. All property could then be owned by the government on behalf of 'the people', a system termed 'socialism'. From this phase communism would develop whereby people co-operated and worked collectively.

Soviet Union
A term used to refer to Russia under communism. A soviet was a workers' council, formed by workers to represent the interests of their members. They were run by the workers themselves. They were often based in areas or cities. Thus, the country was a union of the workers.

Tsarist regime
The government headed by the tsar or emperor.

1914–18 – The First World War

1914–18

March 1918 – Treaty of Brest-Litovsk (Russia pulls out of First World War)

1918

1921 – NEP introduced

1921

1928 – Stalin launches First Five-Year Plan

1928

1941 – Nazi Germany invades the USSR

1941

1945–49 – The Cold War between the USSR and the US develops

1945–49

1956 – Khrushchev starts de-Stalinisation

1956

1964 – Khrushchev is sacked as Soviet leader, replaced by Brezhnev

1964

1985 – Gorbachev becomes Soviet leader

1985

1991 – Attempted army coup to seize power from Gorbachev
December 1991– The Soviet Union is formally disbanded

1991

presented the Bolshevik Party with a dilemma that remained an issue for the Soviet Union throughout its history: that of a Party which declared itself as representing the interests 'of the people' but which, in reality, had limited popular support. Force was used to gain and sustain its control over the country.

1917 – March 1917 – Fall of the Tsarist regime
Provisional government set up
November 1917 – Bolsheviks seize power

1918–21 – 1918–21 – Russian civil war

1924 – 1924 – Death of Lenin

1936 – 1936 – The Great Purge starts

1941–45 – 1941–45 – The Great Patriotic War

1953 – 1953 – Death of Stalin

1962 – 1962 – Cuban Missile Crisis

1982 – 1982 – Death of Brezhnev

1989 – 1989 – Fall of the Berlin Wall. Communist regimes collapse in Eastern Europe

How did the Soviet Union change in the years 1917–91?

Once power had been established, the Bolsheviks aimed to modernise the economy of the Soviet Union in order to unleash the potential of Russia's resources for the benefit of its people. Under Lenin, the government experimented with a mixed economy of private and state-owned sectors, known as the **New Economic Policy (NEP)**. This compromise was swept away by Stalin's Five-Year Plans from 1928. State control was tightened over all aspects of production, with the aim of catching up with the rest of the Western world. Economic growth was impressive during the 1930s and played a key role in ensuring the Soviet Union could defeat the Nazi invasion of 1941. **The Great Patriotic War** (1941–45) wreaked enormous destruction on the Soviet Union, but state direction ensured rapid reconstruction and recovery after 1945. Yet state control resulted in a rigid, planned economy that lacked initiative and flexibility. Despite attempts to invigorate economic performance, by 1980 the economy seemed to be grinding to a halt.

KEY TERMS

New Economic Policy (NEP)
The policy introduced in 1921 to restore the economy after the civil war. It involved using privately owned small-scale trading and shops.

The Great Patriotic War
Term used in Russia for the Second World War, from the Nazi invasion of 1941 until the Soviet victory in 1945. It is also sometimes referred to as the Great Fatherland War.

A similar pattern was followed in social developments. A period of experimentation under Lenin gave way to a system of extensive control over the people under Stalin. Terror was a key feature of Soviet life, with heavy-handed use of the secret police. Despite moves to reduce terror under a policy of de-Stalinisation, put forward by Khrushchev, it remained a significant method by which the Soviet state controlled its people and dealt with opposition. Nonetheless, the Soviet Union always used other instruments of social control as well, such as improving living conditions and providing social security in order to try to win over its people. By the late 1970s these methods were well established, and under Leonid Brezhnev's leadership the Soviet Union rightly claimed to have achieved considerable stability.

Why did the Soviet Union collapse?

By the time of Brezhnev's death in 1982, stability was starting to look like stagnation: economic growth was grinding to a halt, society lacked vigour and the government seemed devoid of ideas. After the quick succession of Andropov and Chernenko, both elderly and ailing leaders, the Communist Party chose Gorbachev as its leader. Gorbachev was from a younger generation and was a politician who realised that the Soviet Union could not go on as it was. He unleashed a period of reforms in an attempt to improve socialism. Yet it was clear that many Soviet people wanted to get rid of socialism. They started to express themselves in ways that the Soviet government could not contain. Calls for economic liberalisation and the growth of nationalism among the peoples of the Soviet Union, including the Russians, were to bring about a swift end to the Soviet state in 1991. Boris Yeltsin emerged as a leading figure in opposing the Soviet monolith. In December 1991, the Soviet Union ceased to exist.

Communism had proved unable to deal with some of the key dilemmas faced by Russia and its status as a leading world power was unclear. The fall of the Soviet Union was to intensify Russian feelings of insecurity and anxiety over their power and position in the world. These consequences are still having an impact on world politics and make the study of 20th-century Russia an essential prerequisite for understanding current affairs.

1.1 Communist government in the USSR, 1917–85

KEY QUESTIONS

- How did the Bolsheviks establish a one-party state between 1917 and 1924?
- How did Stalin exercise power over the Communist Party and the Soviet state?
- To what extent did the nature of Communist Party rule change after the death of Stalin up to 1985?

SOURCE 1 A propaganda poster of the joys of living under communism. The slogan underneath reads 'Glory to our beloved motherland!' Created in 1950 by Bri-Bein, Maria Felixovna



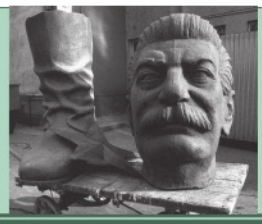
INTRODUCTION

The October Revolution of 1917 saw the establishment of the world's first communist state. The fierce civil war that followed provided the defining characteristics of communist rule in the Soviet Union. The government system established by the Bolsheviks was authoritarian, highly centralised and based on the use of terror to reinforce the dominant position of the Party. These characteristics were to reach an extreme form in the bloody purges carried out by Stalin against members of his own Party in the 1930s. It was not until the death of Stalin in 1953 that reform of this system could be attempted. Under the leadership of Khrushchev, a policy of de-Stalinisation was carried out to reduce the excesses of the government system inherited from Stalin. These reforms were to be limited in their impact and, under the long period of Brezhnev's leadership from 1964 to 1982, the nature of Soviet government became more stable. In the absence of change, the system stagnated. The Soviet Union found it difficult to break away from the key features of communist government established at its birth.

Bolshevik aims

The Bolshevik Party had been established in 1903 as one of several revolutionary groups that wished to bring about change in Russia. Its main target was the increasingly outdated and repressive Tsarist regime that ruled Russia and was, after 1894, in the hands of Tsar Nicholas II. The Tsarist regime collapsed in February 1917 under the strains of the First World War, to be followed by a period of great uncertainty.

The chaos of 1917 provided the Bolsheviks with an unexpected opportunity to seize power and put their aims into practice: to get rid of the upper and middle classes who exploited the workers and peasants under the capitalist system that had developed with the Industrial Revolution. The Bolsheviks believed that this system should be replaced by socialism, through which a government representing the workers would improve the living and working conditions of the people as a whole. Eventually communism would be established, when the people would have control over their own lives.



October 1917 – The October Revolution: the Bolsheviks seize power

March 1918 – Treaty of Brest-Litovsk

1918–21 – Russian Civil War

1921 – Tenth Party Congress: 'On Party Unity' Lenin rules against factions

1922 – Stalin becomes General Secretary USSR established

1934 – Kirov murdered

1936 – The Great Purge starts

1939 – 16/71 Central Committee members left alive

1953 – Death of Stalin

1915 1920 1925 1930 1935 1940 1945 1950

EXTEND YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Karl Marx's view of historical change

The Bolsheviks' view of the world was based on the writings of Karl Marx (1818–83), who saw history as a series of struggles by one class against another to obtain material goods, which led to change. Marx saw historical change as passing through various stages driven by class struggles. These stages were as follows:

1 Primitive communism Humans living in primitive communities where there were no social classes and no concept of private property. This stage can be seen in many Stone Age groups, where humans lived as collectives working together as a group.

2 Feudalism In this phase society would be controlled by the land-owning aristocracy. Their power would be based on their ownership of land and would be exercised over the peasantry, who worked the land.

3 Capitalism The growth of trade and industry produced two new classes: the bourgeoisie (factory owners and merchants) and the proletariat (industrial workers). The bourgeoisie became powerful because they owned the means of production (that is, factories), the means of distribution (for example, railways, shops) and the means of exchange (banks). The proletariat had to rely on selling themselves as labour for the bourgeoisie in order to gain enough money to survive. Marx saw this relationship as one of exploitation; the proletariat being deprived of a fair wage by the bourgeoisie, who pocketed the profit made from goods and services. The proletariat would eventually rise up by their own efforts and get rid of the bourgeoisie.

4 Socialism In this phase, workers' organisations would form a dictatorship of the proletariat to rule on their own behalf. Food, goods and services would be distributed fairly according to need.

5 Communism With no shortage of goods, there would be less need to regulate society. Government would be unnecessary and would gradually wither away. Co-operation would replace competition in a classless society based on the economic principle of 'From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs' (Marx, 1875). The result would be a classless and stateless society.

The writer, Karl Marx, wrote extensively on the economic system that had developed during the Industrial Revolution and his ideas were the basis of much socialist thought. According to Marx, a process of historical change leading from capitalism to communism was inevitable. The Bolshevik leader, Lenin, however, believed that – where possible – this process of change should be helped along.

The Bolshevik Party was used as the vanguard of the Revolution. Lenin believed that a highly centralised and disciplined party should seize power on behalf of the **proletariat**. Power would then be taken away from the **bourgeoisie** and placed in the hands of the Bolshevik Party, who would act as a **dictatorship of the proletariat** to promote socialism by government control over the economy in the interests of the workers. When the risk of counter-revolution was dealt with, then Lenin believed that the state would wither away and communism would develop.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

Marxist ideology

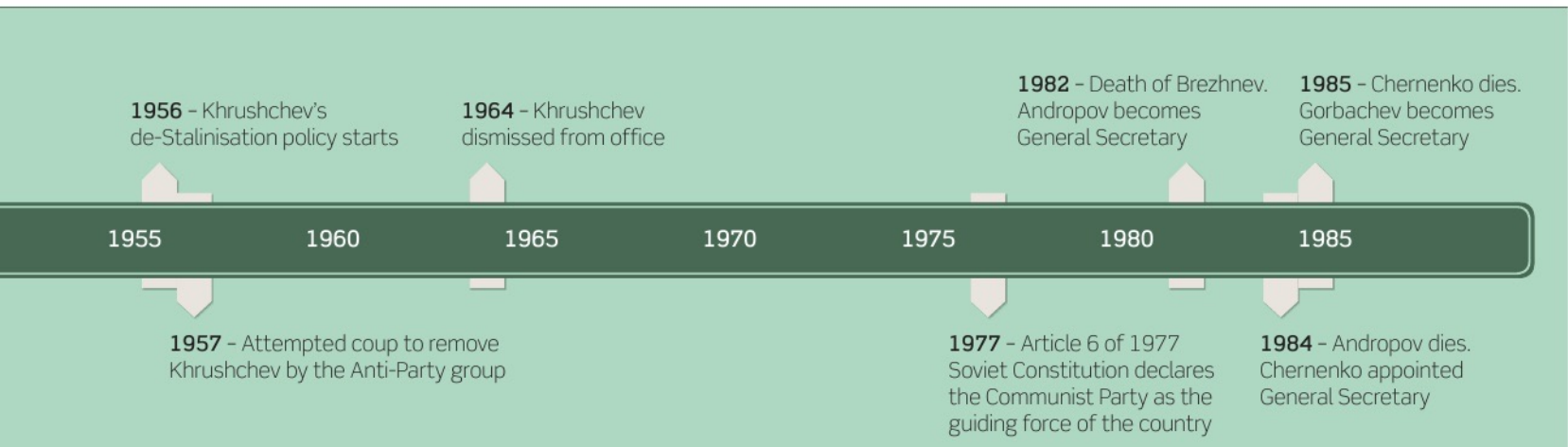
Explain how Lenin's adaptation of Marxist ideology would influence the nature of a Bolshevik government.

KEY TERMS

Proletariat
A term used by Karl Marx to denote the industrial workers, a new class that had emerged as a result of the Industrial Revolution.

Bourgeoisie
The owners of factories, industries and shops, that is, those who own the means of production.

Dictatorship of the proletariat
A government that rules on behalf of the working class. It would take over the reins of power and use that power to smash the bourgeoisie and prevent counter-revolution.



The October Revolution, 1917

The Bolsheviks seized power in October using a well-planned and well-executed uprising. The Provisional Government, which had been set up after the fall of the Tsar, was forced from power. At the time the Bolsheviks were still a small party of about 300,000 members, but in order to justify Bolshevik rule as representing the interests of the workers, the Revolution was portrayed by the Bolsheviks as a mass uprising of the workers. Propaganda presented the event as a heroic storming of the Winter Palace in Petrograd with mass support. The reality was different. The only troops left guarding the palace by this time were the Women's Death Battalion, who opened the gates to let the Bolsheviks in.

The nature of the Revolution determined much of what the Bolsheviks did next. They had seized power with a very limited base of support. Force would be required to ensure the Bolsheviks, a minority party, held on to power.

HOW DID THE BOLSHEVIKS ESTABLISH A ONE-PARTY STATE BETWEEN 1917 AND 1924?

In 1917 Russia was provided with a chance to explore the possibilities of democracy. The Bolsheviks claimed a desire to set up a democratic system that would rule on behalf of the people, for the people, but by 1921 it was clear that in reality they had established a one-party state where all other political groups were banned. Given the opposition they faced, it was perhaps no surprise that the Bolsheviks felt impelled to secure their hold over power in this way. Communist rule under the Bolsheviks was to be authoritarian, highly centralised and supplemented by heavy use of terror.

The creation of a one-party state and the party congress of 1921

The Bolsheviks faced enormous difficulties in attempting to secure their hold on power. These difficulties stemmed from the fact that, although the Party had grown in support since the beginning of 1917, the Bolsheviks remained a relatively small group. Although the Bolsheviks claimed to represent the interests of the proletariat and peasants, they did not have enough support to lead a popular revolution; they had seized power by force. It was no surprise that the Bolsheviks faced opposition to their rule from a range of groups, including the following:

- Other left-wing groups who were denied a share of power by the Bolsheviks, such as the Socialist Revolutionaries (SRs) and the Mensheviks, who were fellow Marxists.
- Groups on the right (such as Tsarist supporters) and liberal groups who often represented the interests of the middle class and who now feared the Bolsheviks would take away their businesses and deny them political freedoms. The ideology of Marxism, with its emphasis on giving power and control to the proletariat, represented a challenge to the rich and privileged within Russia. The old social order seemed to be under attack.
- Nationalist groups within the Russian Empire, such as Ukrainians, Poles and Finns, who saw the collapse of the Tsarist regime as a chance to assert their independence.

It was these groups that the Bolsheviks had to overcome in order to establish a one-party state.

KEY TERM

Constituent Assembly
A parliament elected by the people of Russia. It was seen by many politicians as the first step in forming a democratically elected government. Kerensky, the leader of the Provisional Government, had delayed calling the Assembly and was heavily criticised for this. After the October Revolution, Lenin agreed to hold elections for the Assembly in November 1917.

How did the Bolsheviks deal with the other left-wing groups?

Other left-wing groups shared many of the socialist aims of the Bolsheviks. As a result, groups such as the SRs and Mensheviks hoped that they would be given a share in the new government. Lenin made it clear that there would be no sharing of power. Calls for a socialist coalition from the SRs and Mensheviks, even from some leading Bolsheviks such as Lev Kamenev, were swiftly and firmly rejected by Lenin. Leon Trotsky, Lenin's closest associate, had pointed out to the SRs and Mensheviks: 'You have played out your role. Go where you belong: to the dustbin of history.' Yet, for practical reasons, some left-wing SRs did join the Bolshevik government in the beginning. Even this small measure of co-operation did not last long.

The SRs and the Mensheviks hoped that the calling of a parliament, the **Constituent Assembly**, in January 1918 would be a chance to regain the initiative. The Assembly was to be democratically elected and this played to the strengths of the SRs, who were able to mobilise their support among the peasantry.

The results were not in the Bolsheviks' favour. They gained 175 seats in the Assembly with over nine million votes, but the SRs emerged as the largest single party with 410 seats and 21 million votes. To use the Assembly as a national parliament would clearly pose a threat to continued Bolshevik rule. Lenin therefore dissolved the Assembly after only one meeting and condemned it as an instrument of the bourgeoisie. In place of the Assembly, Lenin used the All-Russian Congress of Soviets as an instrument of popular support. It was, of course, a body where the Bolsheviks had more influence. Not only had Lenin ignored the calls for a socialist coalition, but he had also ensured that there was to be no real forum for opposition.

The destruction of other political parties

- The removal of the vote from 'bourgeois classes', such as employers and priests, stripped the opposition parties of a possible reservoir of support.
- The Mensheviks and SRs found it difficult to publish their newspapers due to restrictions imposed by the Bolsheviks.
- The left-wing SRs, who had been given a role within the Bolshevik government in 1917 and 1918, lost all influence when they walked out of the government in March 1918 in protest at the Bolshevik decision to pull out of the First World War.
- In March 1918, the Bolshevik Party renamed itself the Communist Party and, by 1921, all other parties were effectively banned.
- In April 1921, Lenin declared: 'The place for the Mensheviks and the SRs is in prison.' During the first three months of 1921, 5,000 Mensheviks were arrested. There were further waves of arrests of SR and Menshevik supporters later in 1921 and 1922, but by this stage they had ceased to exist as organised parties.

EXTEND YOUR KNOWLEDGE

The Socialist Revolutionaries (SRs)
A group committed to democratic socialism who believed in the right of groups to govern themselves, for example, peasant organisations. They gained support from sections of the peasantry and often stirred up peasant discontent. They were one of several groups who continued the Russian revolutionary tradition of populism, targeting their ideas at the peasantry, by far the largest social group in Russia at the time. The Socialist Revolutionaries won the elections to the Constituent Assembly but were weakened by divisions into right- and left-wing groupings. SRs were implicated in an assassination attempt on Lenin on 30 August 1918 by Fanya Kaplan. This led to a wave of arrests of SR members.

The Mensheviks
A communist group, more moderate than the Bolsheviks. They had split from the Bolsheviks in 1903 over differences of policy. The Mensheviks were prepared to work with the bourgeoisie in order to bring about gradual reform. They had a larger membership than the Bolsheviks in 1917, but they had been weakened by their co-operation with the Provisional Government. They demanded a role in the new Bolshevik government in the form of a coalition, which Lenin refused. Their opposition to Bolshevik rule was weakened by divisions among their leadership. Rival factions led by Fyodor Dan and Yuli Martov did not reunite until May 1918. By September 1920, Martov had left Russia for Germany. Dan was arrested in 1921 and sent into exile.

The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, 1918

The initial opposition to the Bolsheviks came largely from the other socialist groups. This was because the conservatives had been so shocked by the events of October 1917 that the implications of the Revolution took some time to sink in. The demoralised conservatives were to find a cause of renewed outrage when Lenin put a quick end to Russian involvement in the First World War. Peace was concluded through the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk (1918). The treaty took Russia out of the war at a great cost. Russia lost control over the Baltic States of Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia, Finland, Ukraine and parts of the Caucasus region. It was a national humiliation for the conservatives, especially for military officers who had served in the Tsar's army: a humiliation that could not be tolerated. The only way to restore Russia's pride, and with it the reputation of the armed forces, was to overthrow the Bolshevik regime and reject the Treaty.

The Treaty also provided a necessary spur to those who wished to fight against the Bolsheviks, known as the **Whites**, because it offered the promise of foreign help. The Allied powers of Britain, France, the USA and Japan were anxious to keep Russia in the First World War and were willing to provide arms, money and troops to those who would ensure Russia rejoined the fight.

KEY TERM

Whites
Those opposed to the Bolsheviks during the civil war of 1918–20. The Whites were largely conservative groups within Russia who did not want the old social order changed. The leaders of the Whites were generals and military leaders from the Tsar's armed forces.

So why did Lenin sign the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk if it increased opposition and the likelihood of civil war? He was aware that a key factor in bringing about the collapse of the Tsarist regime and the Provisional Government was the pressure of fighting the First World War. It sapped the energy and resources of the government, with little chance of military success. Lenin realised that if his new government was to consolidate its hold over Russia and deal with its internal enemies, it needed to pull out of the war to concentrate on the job at hand.

The Russian civil war, 1918–21

Given the ideology espoused by the Bolsheviks it was perhaps no surprise that they faced severe opposition from the more conservative elements within Russia. Yet the groups that supported the so-called Whites against the forces of the Bolshevik **Reds** encompassed rather more than just the conservatives.

KEY TERM

Reds
The Bolsheviks and their supporters. The Bolshevik forces were known as the Red Army. Bolshevik support was made up of the industrial workers and many peasants who saw the Bolsheviks as the best guarantors of their gains from the Revolution.

This 'White' opposition included a range of political groups. There were those who wished to see the return of the Tsar; liberals, including supporters of the Provisional Government; military leaders unhappy with Russia pulling out of the First World War; national minorities seeking independence from Russia; and members of the Menshevik and SR parties who had been denied an involvement in the government. The Czech Legion, part of the Austro-Hungarian Army stranded in Russia as prisoners of war, rebelled against the Reds. The Whites also received aid from the Allies in the First World War.

Although initial opposition from the conservatives in Russia was limited, the Bolsheviks were attacked by the forces of General Krasnov at Pulkovo Heights near Petrograd immediately after the October Revolution. The Reds won this first encounter, but it was merely the prelude to the civil war. After the signing of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, opposition to the Bolsheviks mounted, resulting in a series of military campaigns. It was not until the end of 1920 that the Bolsheviks had defeated the Whites and secured communist rule over the country.

How did the Bolsheviks win the civil war?

At the beginning of the civil war, the situation looked bleak for the Bolsheviks. The area directly under Bolshevik control was limited to a central core based on Moscow, stretching to Petrograd in the north-west. They were surrounded on all sides by White forces. Nonetheless, it was the Bolsheviks who emerged victorious. This victory was largely achieved due to the better organisation of the Reds, in military, economic and political terms.

In contrast, the Whites were an amalgam of different groups united only by their desire to get rid of the Bolsheviks. These divisions were reflected in the military strategy of the Whites. Co-operation was limited and was not helped by the long front on which the Whites fought. The Whites did receive help from Russia's former Allies in the First World War but, through corruption and inefficiency, they failed to put this to good effect.

By the end of 1920, all of the White strongholds had been defeated and Bolshevik rule had been extended across the country. The Bolsheviks' military strategy had been more coherent than that of the Whites and a lot of the credit for this must go to the invaluable work of Leon Trotsky. Trotsky, who became Commissar for War in early 1918, turned the Red Army into an effective fighting machine. The army was formed from the Red Guard units and pro-Bolshevik elements of the old Tsarist armed forces. Conscription was introduced to swell the number of soldiers to over five million by the end of the war. The Bolsheviks had also been able to extend government direction over the economy to ensure resources were organised and deployed effectively through the imposition of policies known as War Communism. Large-scale nationalisation of industry ensured adequate supplies for the Red Army (if not for civilians) and food supplies were requisitioned from the peasants. This latter policy was deeply unpopular with the peasants, but it did provide enough food to keep the Red Army going. In this respect, the experience of the civil war had encouraged the Bolsheviks to adopt a highly authoritarian and centrally controlled system. Nevertheless, it was not just better organisation that resulted in the Bolshevik victory. There was also a degree of active support for what the Bolsheviks stood for, especially from the workers who saw the Bolsheviks as the best guarantors of their gains from the Revolution. The peasants did not like all aspects of Bolshevik rule, but the Land Decree of 1917 had guaranteed a distribution of land in their favour. Thus, the Bolsheviks did not neglect the political dimension of the war. Their victory dealt a serious blow to any realistic chance of enemies within Russia threatening the new Bolshevik government.

The key results of the civil war

Russia's civil war, together with the devastation and division caused by the First World War, had a long-term impact on Russia and the Bolshevik state that had been established in its wake.

- The Bolshevik state had become highly centralised due to the demands of the civil war. Fighting a war required quick decision-making and direction of resources by the government. Power was now firmly in the hands of the government (*Sovnarkom*) and party leadership (politburo) based in Moscow.
- The civil war had resulted in the Bolsheviks making extensive use of terror against their political opponents. This set the tone for the development of the Party after the civil war.

- The supporters of the Bolsheviks had been through a formative experience that must have affected them deeply. This experience seemed to reinforce militaristic values in the population. Those who fought in the war were a generation who did not buckle under pressure and who did not think twice about using force and terror.

These results were to be highly influential in moulding the system of government established by the Bolsheviks.

The Tenth Party Congress, 1921

By the time the Bolsheviks held their Tenth Party Congress in March 1921, the civil war was all but won and attention could be focused on dealing with divisions within the Bolshevik Party. The civil war had seen a huge growth in Party membership, from 300,000 at the end of 1917 to over 730,000 by 1921. This posed a threat to Party stability. To ensure conformity within the Party, a firm line was taken against dissent.

The ban on the formation of factions within the Party was put forward by Lenin at the Congress of 1921. This measure, known as 'On Party Unity', was an attempt to impose the view of the leadership on the Party. The penalty for those breaking this rule was expulsion from the Party. Despite victory in the civil war, this political tightening of the power of the Party leadership came at a time of continuing Bolshevik anxiety over their hold over Russia. In 1921, the Bolsheviks had faced the **Kronstadt Mutiny**, a revolt by sailors previously loyal to the Bolsheviks, and a major peasant uprising known as the **Tambov Rising**. Clearly the Bolsheviks could not take their position for granted.

SOURCE 2 Lenin addressing a session of the 10th Congress of the Russian Communist Party in 1921. It was a Congress where Lenin's powers of persuasion were needed to push through difficult policies.



KEY TERMS

Kronstadt Mutiny (1921)
The mutiny of sailors stationed at the Kronstadt naval base against the imposition of orders on the local soviet from the Bolshevik government. The slogan of the mutineers was 'Soviets without Bolsheviks'. The mutiny was brutally crushed by the Red Army, but the affair was a severe shock to the regime because the sailors had previously been strong supporters of the Bolshevik Revolution.

Tambov Rising (1920–21)
A peasant uprising in the Tambov region of central Russia that was sparked off by the arrival of Bolshevik units to requisition grain for use in the cities and the army. The uprising was largely spontaneous at first, but the peasants were able to build on their strength by forming a Green Army and establishing control over a large area. It took over 50,000 Bolshevik troops to put down the revolt.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

The consolidation of Bolshevik power

1 Make a list of the methods used by the Bolsheviks to deal with other political groups between 1917 and 1921.

2 Which of these methods do you think was the most important? Explain your answer.

3 Explain how the civil war influenced the nature of Bolshevik government established by 1921.

The nature of government under Lenin

The apparatus of government

The machinery of government administration had fallen into chaos before the Bolsheviks came to power. Lenin needed to put in place a state administration that better suited his own revolutionary purposes. Governing a country the size of Russia would require a clear line of authority whereby decisions could be made and imposed on the country effectively and quickly.

Organisations that genuinely represented the proletariat, such as the soviets, **trade unions** and **factory committees**, were brought under Bolshevik control and then sidelined. A system was devised based on representative bodies that in theory stemmed from the All-Russian Congress of Soviets and was headed by the *Sovnarkom*.

KEY TERMS

Trade union
An organisation that represented workers' interests according to trade, for example railway workers or steel workers.

Factory committee
A small group that represented workers within a particular factory and often contained workers of different trades but who were based in the same workplace.

- The ***Sovnarkom*** was the Council of People's Commissars and took the role of a cabinet of top government ministers who were, in theory, responsible for making key decisions and giving government orders. Its members, about 20 in total, were elected by the Central Executive Committee. It was a small group that could make quick decisions and it met on a daily basis during the civil war.
- The **Central Executive Committee** was a larger group elected by the Congress of Soviets. Its task was to oversee the work of the government and its administration.
- The **All-Russian Congress of Soviets** was the supreme law-making body of the state. All laws issued by the *Sovnarkom* had to be approved by the Congress. It was, in theory, a highly representative body made up of members elected by local soviets, all those citizens engaged in 'useful work'.

Below this structure were provincial and city soviets made up of representatives from local soviets. These bodies conducted the administration of government at local level.

This system of government apparatus was, in principle, very democratic, but the reality was different. During the chaotic situation of the civil war, the Bolsheviks used their control over positions in the *Sovnarkom* to issue orders that were merely rubber-stamped by the Congress of Soviets and therefore imposed on the country.

Party control over the state

By the early 1920s, it was clear that the real power had shifted from this apparatus of state towards the Party itself. The Party apparatus mirrored that of the state.

- The **Politburo** was a group of seven to nine leading members of the Bolshevik Party, who were chosen by the Party's Central Committee to make the key decisions affecting policy. It took over from the larger Central Committee, which quickly proved to be unmanageable when making important decisions. The Politburo met daily under Lenin and became more important than the *Sovnarkom*. Besides Lenin, leading members included Grigory Zinonviev, Lev Kamenev, Leon Trotsky and Josef Stalin.
- The **Central Committee** was a group of 30–40 members chosen by the Party Congress to represent its members. The Central Committee was supposed to make key decisions on policy but, after 1919, power was increasingly delegated to the Politburo.
- The **Party Congress** was a body made up of representatives of local Party branches. It discussed the general programme of the Party and there were fierce debates at the Ninth and Tenth Party Congresses of 1920 and 1921. The ban on factions under the ruling On Party Unity, which was passed in 1921, stifled debate, and the role of the Congress in influencing policy subsequently declined. It met yearly under Lenin from 1917 and this pattern continued until 1926.
- Below the level of Congress were **local Party branches**, each headed by a Party secretary. These secretaries could be very powerful, especially those who headed branches in key cities or provinces. Kamenev was head of the Party in Petrograd and Zinoviev in Moscow; both had significant power bases that allowed them to play an important part in the struggle to succeed Lenin.

Thus, the Party organisations mirrored those of the state. Yet it was the Party structure that controlled decision-making, while the state became little more than an organisation of administrators. The decline of the state was indicated by the increasing infrequency of meetings of the Congress of Soviets, Central Executive Committee and the *Sovnarkom*. When leading Bolsheviks were members of both the Politburo and the *Sovnarkom*, they sent their deputies to the latter. Another sign of the relative power of state and Party was the decision in 1919 to make the secret police directly responsible to the Politburo rather than the *Sovnarkom*.

Democratic Centralism

The Bolsheviks claimed their government was based on the principle of Democratic Centralism. Soviets were used as bodies that represented the workers at local level. Their wishes could be expressed through a structure of representative organisations that would take their concerns to decision-making bodies at the higher levels of government. Decisions could then be made in the interests of 'the people' and passed down to regional and local level for implementation.

This principle was used by the Bolsheviks, and most other communist regimes, as evidence of their highly democratic nature. The reality was different. The soviets had been undermined as soon as the Bolsheviks took power. The system of ruling by decree meant that they were not involved in decision-making. Although the soviets continued to exist they were dominated by the Bolsheviks, who ensured that they were no longer responsive to pressure from the workers they were supposed to represent. Local soviets were used as part of local government, but they were firmly in the hands of local Party bosses who gave the orders. This system turned representative bodies into rubber-stamping bodies that merely carried out orders given by the centre.

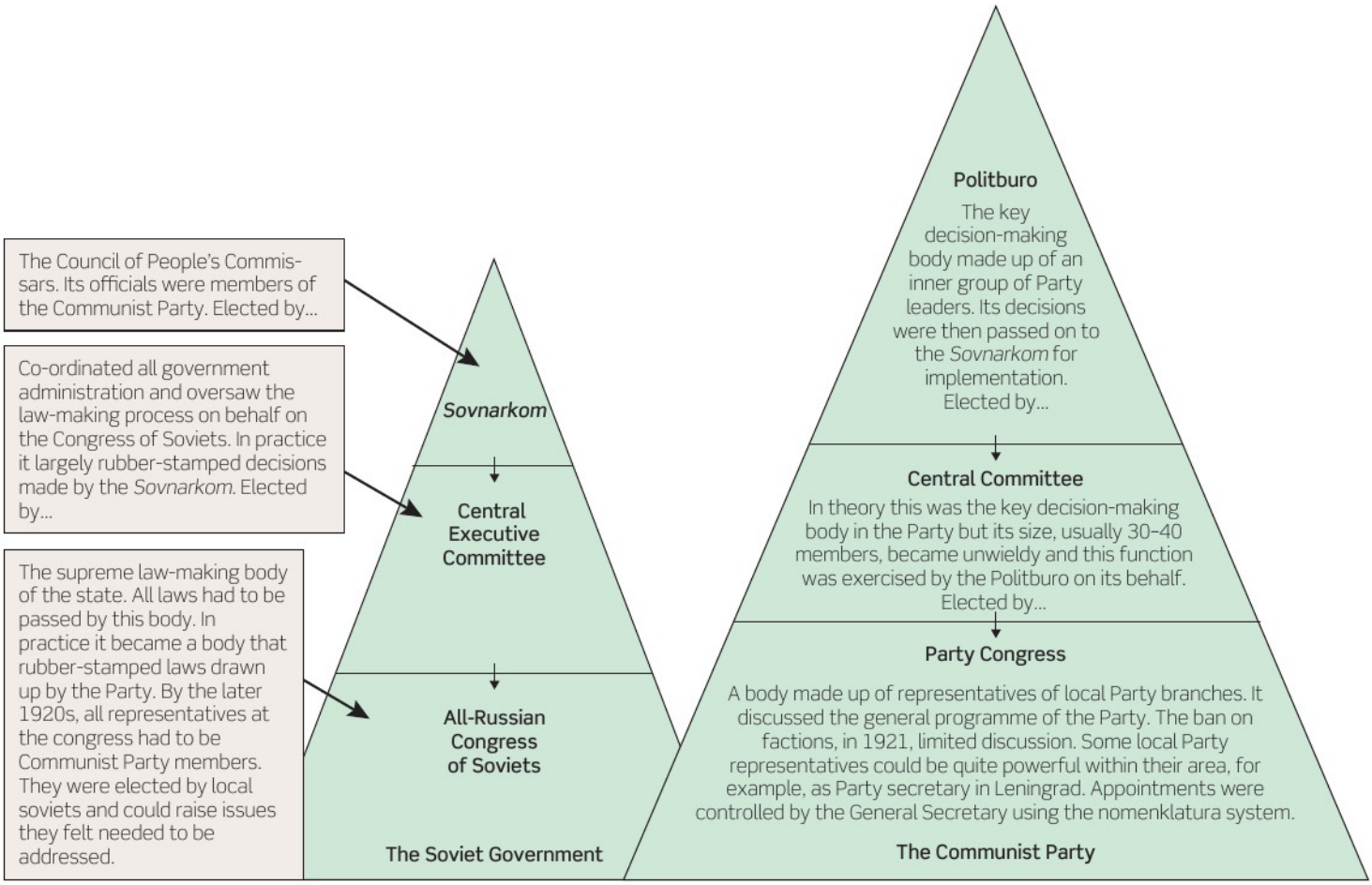


Figure 1.1 The structures of Party and state under Lenin.

The growing centralisation of power

If the apparatus of state was now in the hands of the Party, it was also true that the Party was quickly placed in the hands of the Party leadership. Power became centralised in the hands of the Politburo.

The Party leadership ensured rigid central control was exercised over the Party's structure and its own members. When the Bolsheviks seized power, the party organisation was chaotic, but the leadership was to extend its control. Local branches of the Party were brought firmly under the control of the organisations at the centre of the Party. To aid decision-making during the civil war, power was transferred upwards towards the Politburo. This ensured rapid responses to constantly changing circumstances. After the civil war, this system became entrenched as those with power were reluctant to give it up.

The personal power of Lenin

Lenin's official positions in government were as Chair of the *Sovnarkom* and as one of the Politburo members. Lenin preferred a collective leadership whereby issues were discussed before decisions could be made. In 1919, he dismissed all suggestions of a personal dictatorship as 'utter nonsense'.

Despite this, there is no doubt that Lenin was able to exercise considerable influence by weight of his own personal authority. Many Bolsheviks looked up to Lenin and saw him as a source of inspiration, expecting him to provide strong leadership. When the Party was faced with difficult decisions that produced heated debates, Lenin could bring the Party into line by making threats to resign from his Party position. He did this over the decision to sign the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in 1918 and the adoption of the New Economic Policy (NEP) in 1921. Yet, from 1922 onwards, Lenin's power to exert influence over Party and government was limited by severe illness. He suffered a series of strokes and his health deteriorated. After his third stroke, in March 1923, Lenin lost the capacity to speak except in monosyllables such as '*vot vot*' (here, here) and he remained incapacitated for the last year of his life. Lenin's colleagues were already jockeying for position in preparation for the struggle to succeed him. Power had been centralised in the Party structure rather than in the personal authority of Lenin. Several key developments were to reinforce this centralisation of power.

EXTEND YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Lenin the dictator?

Historians have often pointed to the trend of Lenin centralising power in his own hands as evidence that he was a dictator. This view needs to be challenged in two respects. Firstly, Moscow found it extremely difficult to extend its full control to the most distant provinces where local officials continued to exercise power without too much central intervention. Secondly, recent research has shed a different light on the process of centralisation. While not denying the trend towards authoritarianism, historians such as Robert Service (1997) have drawn attention to the attitudes of local party members who, in the chaos of the early years of the regime, actively welcomed greater direction from above. During the civil war, local party members were desperate for support.

KEY TERMS

Bureaucracy
The civil service (administrators) who administer government policies.

Nomenklatura system
A system of appointing people to jobs from a list approved by the Party leadership. Evidence of commitment to the Party cause was necessary in order to remain on the list. This system also encouraged corruption as favours were expected from those who were placed on the list and promoted.

USSR
The initials of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the official name of the area controlled by the Communist Party, sometimes referred to as the Soviet Union. It was established in 1922. The USSR was made up of four republics and this expanded to 15 after the Second World War. Russia was the dominant republic, but it also encompassed substantial non-Russian nationalities.

The growth of party bureaucracy and the nomenklatura system

What was to aid Communist Party control was the growth of a vast party **bureaucracy**. By 1921, the Bolshevik Party, now renamed the Communist Party, was much bigger than it had been in 1917. In the absence of virtually all other political forces, many had joined the Party to improve their career prospects in the new regime, but they were not necessarily committed communists. To ensure the development of a more committed communist bureaucracy, the Party developed the **nomenklatura system**. This involved drawing up lists of approved party employees suitable for certain jobs from which appointments could be made. This was a system that encouraged loyalty to the Party leaders. To not be loyal was to lose your place on the list and, with it, your chances of promotion. It was an effective tool of centralisation administered by the General Secretary. By 1924, the membership of the Communist Party had reached about one million and this entailed a large organisation peopled by administrators who were beginning to form a class in itself with its own values and attitudes. These attitudes tended to be self-serving rather than aimed at benefiting the industrial proletariat.

The Soviet Constitution of 1924

By 1922, the position of the Bolsheviks was strong enough to extend the control of the Party over the outlying regions of the old Russian Empire. The tactics used by the Bolsheviks were to send in Red Army forces while encouraging local Bolsheviks to stage unrest by organising mass demonstrations and street violence.

The Constitution, which was finally established in 1924, was an important step in the centralisation of power in the Soviet state. The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (**USSR**) was in theory a federal state, but in practice it tightened the authority of the Communist Party based in Moscow. The Party bodies in the various republics, such as Ukraine, were firmly under the control of the central Party structure. The Soviet constitution confirmed the power of the Communist Party in the state but did give some representation to Party members from each of the republics. The name 'Union of Soviet Socialist Republics' also emphasised the fact that this was formally a federal system. There was no use of 'Russia' in the name of the new state. However, the Russians had the advantage of sheer numbers over the national minorities. Russia made up 90 percent of the land-area and 72 percent of the population of the new state. In addition, nearly three-quarters of the Communist Party were Russian.

The use of terror

The hold of the Bolshevik leaders over the Party was reinforced by the use of terror. Bolshevik terror was implemented by the Cheka, which was headed by Felix Dzerzhinsky. It was a Party committee formed in December 1917 to deal with counter-revolution, sabotage and speculation, and it was soon operating outside the law. Yet it also dealt with enemies within the Party and played a key role in establishing central control over the Party apparatus.

The Cheka was based in the Lubyanka building in Moscow. It was here that arrests were planned and prisoners were tortured. It also carried out executions of suspects without using official courts. Left-wing opponents had been arrested in August 1918 after an assassination attempt on Lenin. Waves of further arrests occurred in 1921 and 1922, known as the Red Terror. Between 1917 and 1923, the Cheka was responsible for the executions of up to 200,000 people. The secret police grew enormously, from 40,000 in December 1918 to 250,000 by 1921.

In 1922, after the civil war, the Cheka was replaced by the **OGPU**. Terror became more bureaucratic and discreet. It also became more inward-looking. Attention was turned to groups within the Party and large numbers were purged. There was a purge, known as a **Chistka** (cleansing), in 1918 and another during the early 1920s. Under Lenin, about one-third of the Party were purged.

KEY TERMS

OGPU
The All-Union State Political Administration (briefly known as the GPU). Its activities were brought under greater supervision by the state to ensure that it worked within the law. Its continuity in function was stressed by the fact that Dzerzhinsky, who had headed the Cheka, was appointed its leader.

Chistka
Russian term for cleansing. Usually applied to the purges of Party members that occurred periodically under Lenin. They were non-violent and those who were 'cleansed' had their Party membership withdrawn.

EXTEND YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Felix Dzerzhinsky
From a wealthy Polish background, he used his powers as head of the Cheka to root out and destroy bourgeois enemies of the state. He stated that the Cheka 'does not serve to judge the enemy, but strikes it down'. He was single-minded, dedicated and ruthless. Other Bolsheviks sometimes referred to him as the 'Shield of the Revolution'. He died of a heart attack in 1926.

Intimidation and purges were needed to maintain discipline and order in a rapidly expanding Party. Therefore, intimidation was directed at elements within the Party, such as adventurers, drunkards and hooligans. The Bolsheviks were a minority group and, as such, fear and intimidation were essential mechanisms for maintaining their hold on power, especially in the circumstances of the civil war.

The fact that the use of terror continued after the civil war indicates a lack of confidence by Bolsheviks in their hold on power. One victim was Bim-Bom, a clown in the Moscow circus. His act included anti-Bolshevik jokes but he was hardly a serious threat. At the end of his life, Lenin seems to have developed an obsession over the use of terror. He showed a particular interest in the execution of priests. This seems to indicate that Lenin was developing his own personal agenda for the use of terror.

Degree of centralisation

Although Lenin had been able to exert considerable control over Party and state, and develop a highly centralised system, there were limits. In a country the size of Russia, central control did not always extend to remote areas. Government was often chaotic and this provided opportunities for a local mafia of Bolsheviks and **black marketeers** to defy Party orders from Moscow. It would also be wrong to assume that all debate within the Party was stifled.

KEY TERM

Black marketeer
Those who sold goods illegally, often at inflated prices. They were particularly common during times of shortage.

- Both Kamenev and Zinoviev had opposed Lenin's decision to launch the Revolution in 1917.
- There was a fierce debate within the Party over whether to accept the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in 1918.
- The introduction of the New Economic Policy in 1921 led to the formation of right- and left-wing factions within the Party.
- The role of the trade unions was to be a source of much debate within the Party. A Workers' Opposition group, led by Alexander Shliapnikov and Alexandra Kollontai, favoured a greater role for the trade unions and this was discussed at the Ninth and Tenth Party Congresses of 1920 and 1921. Lenin took action to crush this group but it did not prevent other groups, such as Workers' Truth, emerging.

In 1922, Joseph Stalin was appointed General Secretary of the Party. Part of his role was to keep an eye on potential opposition in the Party.

Conclusion

By 1924, the leadership of the Communist Party had dealt successfully with all opposition outside its ranks as well as crushing any significant dissent within its structure. This was achieved so effectively that the Party was able to expand enormously without sacrificing unity or the conformity of its members. Now the Party was in a position where it could act as the state and govern the country unhindered. Lenin had written about the need for a Dictatorship of the Proletariat to guide the masses to communism, but the dictatorship established was also a response to circumstances. The growth in the power and size of the Party was in many cases a product of the civil war; authoritarianism and terror had seemed necessary to ensure survival.

The Bolshevik seizure of power in 1917 underlined the importance of the idea of the Party as a vanguard of the Revolution, but the exercise of power raised issues over interpreting the idea of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat. The Bolsheviks claimed that all of their actions – seizing the means of production, using violence and terror, establishing a centralised, authoritarian regime – were in the interests of the proletariat, but it became clear that the Revolution was in danger of becoming a dictatorship of the Communist Party. By the mid-1920s many Bolshevik supporters had become disillusioned at the lack of real gains for the proletariat while the state, far from withering away, became a vast bureaucracy that seemed to be running the country for its own benefit.

ACTIVITY
WRITING

Use the words listed below to complete the sentences so that they best describe the nature of government under Lenin.

prerequisite; accelerated; reinforced; encouraged; advocated

The growth of centralised Party control over Russia was partly a product of Bolshevik ideology, which ..... the need for a dictatorship of the proletariat. The trend towards establishing this was ..... by the conditions experienced during the civil war. The threat of military opposition ..... the need for strict discipline. When the war was won, the Bolsheviks were reluctant to give up this strong centralised control. The sheer size of the country convinced many Bolsheviks that strong rule was an essential ..... for holding on to power. The use of terror ..... the Bolshevik hold over the population.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

Lenin's control over the Party

1 Explain how the following were used to centralise power in the Communist Party:

a) the nomenklatura system

b) the Soviet Constitution, 1924

c) the use of terror.

2 Which of these methods of centralisation do you think was the most important? Justify your answer.

3 How much power did Lenin have over the Communist Party?

4 What gave Lenin power over the Communist Party?

HOW DID STALIN EXERCISE POWER OVER THE COMMUNIST PARTY AND THE SOVIET STATE?

Even before Lenin died in January 1924 his illness had raised the prospect of a struggle between rivals to succeed him as leader of the Party. On Lenin's death a collective leadership was formed by members of the Politburo, but the period 1924–28 was one of constantly changing rivalries within this group. By 1928, Stalin had emerged as the real power in the Communist Party, a position that he achieved through the use of powers he had gained as General Secretary of the Party. The rise of Stalin was a clear reflection of where real power now lay in the Soviet Union. It was power he was to use increasingly to eliminate his opponents and establish a personal dictatorship. In doing so, Stalin's method of ruling built on trends evident under Lenin.

The elimination of opponents in government and party

The powers of the General Secretary: Stalin's power base in the Communist Party

Stalin had laid down the basis of his power during Lenin's illness. He had become General Secretary of the Party in 1922. It was a position that others had already turned down as being too boring and unlikely to further one's career. Stalin was quick to see the opportunities the position offered to gather information and influence.

Above all, Stalin recognised that developments under Lenin's leadership had made the main focus of power the Party rather than the government. As the Party had developed into the organs for administering the state, it was the Party structure that grew in power and size, and the head of the Party structure was the General Secretary.

As General Secretary, Stalin was head of the Party secretariat, which was responsible for the day-to-day running of the Party. This gave Stalin specific powers of influence:

- The General Secretary co-ordinated work across all Party departments and had access to a vast range of information.
- He gained access to over 26,000 personal files on Party members – a useful source of information that could be used against rivals. In this post he had Dzerzhinsky, the head of the secret police, report to him regularly. There were few Politburo members who were not under his surveillance.
- He was responsible for deciding the agenda of Party meetings. This was a useful tool for restricting the issues that could be debated.
- Stalin's position was further enhanced by the launching of the Lenin Enrolment between 1923 and 1925. The aim of this membership drive was to increase the number of industrial workers in the Party ranks. Over 500,000 workers were recruited, doubling the Party's membership, and this had important consequences. The new members were largely poorly educated and politically naive. It is clear that these new members saw the Party as a source of employment and other privileges, and that retaining these privileges depended on loyalty to those who had allowed them into the Party. As General Secretary, it was Stalin who was responsible for supervising the Lenin Enrolment. Stalin was always careful to ensure he could identify with the needs and demands of these new members and his humble background may well have helped him to do this.
- Stalin had the right to appoint people to Party positions and this provided him with a tool to promote his own supporters to key positions. As time went on, more and more party officials were loyal to Stalin, and the post of General Secretary gave him considerable powers of patronage. Those who opposed Stalin were removed from the Politburo and replaced by people such as Vyacheslav Molotov, Mikhail Kalinin, and Kliment Voroshilov, all cronies of Stalin. Sergei Kirov was made head of the Party in Leningrad in 1926 when Stalin wanted a loyal supporter to replace the out-of-favour Zinoviev.

When it came to votes on Party issues, Stalin could always outvote and outmanoeuvre his opponents. Party Congresses became dominated by people who owed their positions and loyalty to Stalin.

Lenin may have created the Party structure, but it was Stalin who was able to use it to his full advantage. It was a job that suited Stalin's skills and where his capacity for thoroughness in administration could prosper. Some Party members nicknamed Stalin 'Comrade Card-Index', a reference to his willingness to undertake routine administrative tasks. Nikolai Sukhanov referred to Stalin as the 'grey blur', a good administrator but someone who lacked personality. These comments may seem like criticisms of Stalin's qualities, but it meant that Stalin could build up his power largely unnoticed.

AS Level Exam-Style Question Section A

Was terror the main method by which the Bolshevik leadership exercised control over the Party between 1917 and 1924? Explain your answer. (20 marks)

Tip

As well as developing the ways in which the Bolsheviks used terror, make sure you address the key words 'main method'. Develop your reasoning by explaining how terror was used alongside and linked to other methods.

Stalin's opponents in the Politburo

The struggle for power after the death of Lenin had been played out between the members of the Politburo.

- **Leon Trotsky**, considered by many Bolsheviks to be the obvious successor, was often arrogant and was not really a team player. This did little to endear him to his fellow Bolsheviks. He made few attempts to organise himself and his supporters within the Party, viewing inter-Party squabbling as beneath him.
- **Gregory Zinoviev** had worked closely with Lenin and had a strong power base as Party Secretary in Leningrad. He was a skilled orator, but he was vain and ineffective in practical matters.
- Lack of principle was also an accusation used against **Lev Kamenev**, the Party Secretary in Moscow.
- **Nikolai Bukharin** was described by Lenin as 'the golden boy' of the Party. He was relatively young and highly intelligent, but he lacked political experience.
- **Mikhail Tomsky** was a leading figure in the trade union movement, but his influence declined with that of the trade unions. Lenin had reduced the political power of the unions, restricting their role to helping workers within the workplace.
- **Alexei Rykov** succeeded Lenin as Chair of the *Sovnarkom*, but his outspoken approach upset fellow Bolsheviks. His effectiveness was hampered by a serious drinking problem.

As well as the deficiencies in personality that weakened the level of support these political rivals could muster, their place in the structures of the new government held few of the advantages that Stalin was to reap from the position of General Secretary.

Stalin's removal of political rivals and his securing of power

By 1928, Stalin had already done much to neutralise the power and influence of his opponents. This had been achieved by exploiting the divisions within the Politburo over the best way for the Revolution to move forward. Those on the Left of the Party, which included Trotsky, Kamenev and Zinoviev, had called for 'Permanent Revolution' by encouraging proletarian revolution throughout the world. They also favoured breaking with Lenin's economic policy. Those on the Right, Bukharin, Tomsky and Rykov, preferred to stick to Lenin's policy, at least in the short-term. Stalin used these differences to manipulate his opponents.

The Left had been dealt with in 1926, their views criticised at the Fifteenth Party Conference. Accused of forming factions, they were expelled from the Politburo and demoted. They were then expelled from the Party. In 1928, Zinoviev and Kamenev were readmitted to the Party after renouncing their previous views, but Trotsky preferred to stick to his principles and was exiled to Alma-Ata in Central Asia. One year later, he was expelled from the Soviet Union.

During the winter of 1927–28, the Party leadership found itself once again divided over the issue of industrialisation as Stalin aimed to launch the First Five-Year Plan to galvanise the economy. Those on the Right of the Party were concerned that the removal of the NEP could actually cause food production to decline because of opposition from the peasantry. In early 1928, the proposals for the Five-Year Plan led to the emergence of a **Right Opposition** group that began to argue the case for a continuation of the NEP.

In this debate over the NEP, Stalin saw the views of the Right as standing in the way of his policy of '**Socialism in one country**', threatening to slow down any progress that could be made in strengthening the economic base of the Soviet Union and socialism. After the removal of the threat from the Left it seemed that Stalin was prepared to outmanoeuvre the Right. Stalin used his power and influence in the Party to ensure the Right were defeated.

- Stalin issued an official directive to Party members, *The Foundations of Leninism*, that presented the case for removing the NEP. It was brief and easy-to-read, ideal for those new politically naive Party members who had been allowed into the Party under the Lenin Enrolment.
- Stalin undermined Bukharin's position by stressing Bukharin's disagreements with Lenin during the early 1920s.
- Bukharin was accused of Trotskyism because he had criticised the growth of the bureaucracy, an argument which had also been put forward by Trotsky.
- Bukharin had arranged a secret meeting with Zinoviev and Kamenev in 1928. This enabled Stalin to accuse Bukharin of forming factions within the Party, a serious accusation that, if proven, carried the death penalty. Bukharin restricted himself to working within the official channels to try to gain support.
- Supporters of the Right in the Moscow Party branch and the trade unions were removed on Stalin's orders.
- Stalin undermined Bukharin's support for retaining the NEP by highlighting its failure to prevent food shortages in the cities. He also approved emergency grain requisitioning, a move that drew attention to the problems of the NEP.
- When it came to votes over policy decisions, such as during the Central Committee meeting of April 1929, Stalin could rely on the support of those who owed their positions to him.

In April 1929, Bukharin was forced to admit to errors of political judgement. The Right Opposition in the Politburo was identified by name and all were removed from their posts, except Rykov, who remained Head of the Government until 1930. At this stage Stalin was prepared to accept that the demotion of the Right was an adequate way of neutralising their opposition to his position and policies.

The collective leadership, which had been declared in 1924 on the death of Lenin, was no more. Stalin had whittled away at the powers and positions of his main rivals until, by early 1929, he was in a dominant position. Stalin was a skilled and manipulative politician but he was also a product of the government system established by Lenin. He represented the growing class of Party bureaucrats who wished to maintain the privileges of their positions.

KEY TERMS

Right Opposition
Those in the Communist Party who wished to see the continuation of the NEP rather than Stalin's forced industrialisation of the USSR under the First Five-Year Plan. Its leaders were Bukharin, Rykov and Tomsky. By 1930, they had been removed from their positions of power within the Party. The Right Opposition was finally dealt with by the purges in 1938: most of its members were executed.

Socialism in one country
Stalin's policy of modernisation through industrialisation, by utilising the resources of the Soviet Union.

The purges of the 1930s

Stalin had removed his rivals from positions of power, but his hold over the Party was significantly increased by the purges he conducted against its members in the 1930s. Whether real or imagined, enemies of Stalin were disposed of in a brutal and bloody manner using the apparatus of terror established under Lenin.

The instruments of terror

The use of terror, which had played a role in the Communist hold on power since 1917, was to become a central feature of Stalin's rule. The key instruments of terror were:

- the Party Secretariat, which collected information on Party members that could be used to condemn them as enemies of the people
- the secret police, who carried out surveillance, arrests and executions. They also ran the labour camps, known as the Gulag, where many victims of the purges were imprisoned. The Cheka, set up by Lenin, had evolved into the NKVD by 1934. By this stage, the secret police had become increasingly bureaucratic and its role dominated the whole police force.

Purges of Party members had happened periodically under Lenin to root out undesirable elements, for example after the civil war ended. This process usually involved members being asked to hand in their Party membership cards before being expelled from the Party. It was not a violent process. Nonetheless, the apparatus of terror had been established by Lenin and it was no surprise that Stalin made use of it.

The Chistka of 1932–35

In 1932, a new purge of Party membership was carried out. It was the response of the Party to difficulties experienced during the launching of the First Five-Year Plan and the collectivisation of agriculture. The speed at which these policies were implemented caused concern among some local Party officials. Unhappy with the orders they received from the Party leadership in Moscow, they ignored them. The Chistka was designed to remove these officials in order to speed up the implementation of economic policy. By 1935, 22 percent of the Party had been removed from their posts. It was essentially a non-violent process, but it did show that opposition to Stalin's policies was mounting.

Opposition – real or imagined?

The purges of the 1930s were to become increasingly violent and were directed against a wide range of people within the Party. The key victims included Kamenev and Zinoviev on the Left of the Party, as well as Bukharin, Tomsky and Rykov from the Right. However, the purges also extended down through the Party to local level, involving quotas set by Stalin, detailing what percentage of each Party branch should be identified as 'enemies of the people'. Accusations were made against the victims that were increasingly absurd: working with Trotsky, spying for capitalist powers, plotting to assassinate Stalin. One victim was accused of meeting fellow saboteurs in a hotel which had not been built at the time! The bizarre nature of the purges has led some historians to conclude that they can only be explained by the fact that they reflect Stalin's paranoid personality. Stalin was to tell Nikita Khrushchev: 'I trust nobody, not even myself.'

By the 1930s, the Soviet Union was no longer in a state of crisis (as it had been during the civil war of 1919–20) which could be used to justify terror. However, it was clear that there was increasing criticism of Stalin's policies by 1932:

- In 1932, Ryutin, a former party secretary, issued a document to members of the Central Committee that was highly critical of Stalin. He accused Stalin of building a personal dictatorship and called upon members of the Central Committee to remove him from power.
- The brutality that was used to enforce the policy of collectivisation in agriculture was a major cause of criticism. Peasant resistance had resulted in serious unrest, especially in Ukraine and the Caucasus region. These concerns had been raised by Stalin's own wife, Nadezhda Alliluyeva, before she committed suicide in 1932.
- Party officials were often critical of the unrealistic targets set under the Five-Year Plans and drew attention to the fact that they could not be achieved.
- At the Seventeenth Party Congress of 1934 these criticisms gained strength. The congress was supposed to be a 'Congress of Victors', celebrating the successes of the First Five-Year Plan. When it met, moderates within the Party put pressure on Kirov, the up-and-coming Leningrad Party Secretary, to present these criticisms so that the pace of change could be slowed. Kirov received a wave of support and standing ovations that matched those received by Stalin.

It was within this context of growing criticism that **the Great Purge** of the 1930s took place.

The murder of Kirov, 1934

The event that was to precipitate the Great Purge was the murder of Kirov on 1 December 1934. Kirov was assassinated by Leonid Nikolayev, a Party member with a personal grudge against both the Party and Kirov. Nikolayev felt that the Party had not appreciated his talents and there were rumours of an affair between Nikolayev's wife and Kirov. There were, nevertheless, suspicious circumstances surrounding the murder. Why was Kirov without his bodyguard at the time of the murder? Why had members of the NKVD trained Nikolayev to fire a pistol? For these reasons it has been suggested that the murder of Kirov was carried out on Stalin's orders. The official explanation was that Kirov's assassin was a member of an opposition group led by Zinoviev and Kamenev and, in a pattern that was to become familiar, one arrest led to the implication and arrest of others, usually on trumped-up charges. Both Zinoviev and Kamenev were arrested, brought to trial in January 1935 and sentenced to long terms of imprisonment. Thus, the murder of Kirov was the catalyst for the purging of large sections of the Communist Party.

The show trials

During 1935 and 1936, there was a wave of denunciations and arrests of members of the **Left Opposition** who were still at large. Party members were advised to be vigilant against the 'enemies of the people' in all of their disguises. This led to a series of **show trials** whereby former leading figures in the Party were accused of anti-Soviet activities. Victims were usually dealt with in waves:

KEY TERMS

The Great Purge
The term used to describe the wave of terror that Stalin and his supporters used to remove enemies. The targets were so-called enemies of the state or people who were accused of crimes they often could not possibly have committed. Victims of the purge were either sent to labour camps or shot.

Left Opposition
Those in the Party who had supported the call for Permanent Revolution in the 1920s. This had put them against Stalin, who had called for 'Socialism in one country'. The Left had also called for rapid industrialisation and the abandonment of the NEP before Stalin was ready to do so. Because the Left were associated with the views of Trotsky, it was relatively easy to attack them as enemies of the state. Trotsky, although he had fled abroad, continued to denounce Stalin.

Show trial
Public trials of leading enemies of the state. The proceedings were often filmed so that they could be used as propaganda in the cinemas. In this way they could be used to justify the actions taken against leading Party members, as well as being a warning to others.

- **The Trial of the Sixteen** involved the leaders of the Left, including Zinoviev and Kamenev, in August 1936. They were dragged from prison and accused of working as agents of Trotsky to undermine the state. Under severe pressure from the NKVD, they confessed to crimes they could not possibly have carried out, including the murder of Kirov. They also implicated others in the conspiracy, including the former leaders of the Right.
- **The Trial of the Seventeen** in 1937 was a purge of Party officials such as Karl Radek and Georgy Pyatakov. They were accused of working for Trotsky and foreign governments to undermine the Soviet economy through wrecking and sabotage. Their real crime was probably criticising the Five-Year Plans.
- **The Trial of the Twenty-one** in 1938 was a purge of the Right. Tomsky had committed suicide before he could be brought to trial, but Bukharin and Rykov were accused of forming a 'Trotskyite-Rightist Bloc', a crime to which they both confessed. There was no hard evidence of these links with Trotsky, but Bukharin's article 'Notes of an Economist' made clear some of his criticisms of Stalin's economic policies. He was a threat to Stalin and had to go.

The show trials were staged with great care to ensure that other party members were intimidated by the power of the state. The proceedings were relayed to the Soviet population via radio and film footage. The state prosecutor, Andrei Vyshinsky, used his position to abuse the accused (see Source 3).

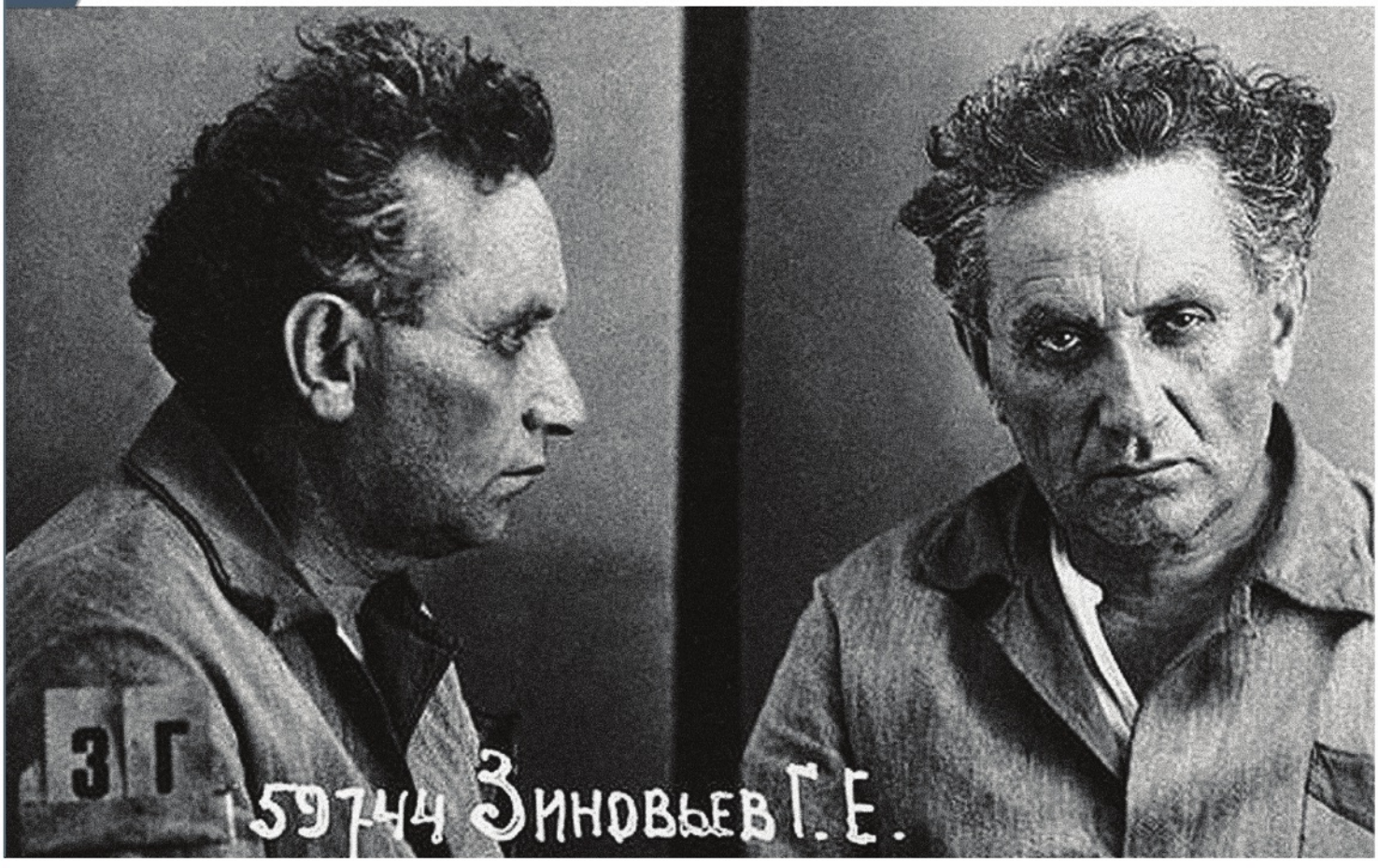
SOURCE 3 A court statement by Andrei Vyshinsky during the trial of Kamenev and Zinoviev in 1936.

> Shoot these rabid dogs. Death to this gang who hide their ferocious teeth, their eagle claws, from the people! Down with that vulture Trotsky, from whose mouth a bloody venom drips, putrefying the great ideals of Marxism!

Part of this process was the confession of the accused to their crimes. Unbeknown to the public, they were confessions produced under torture. Stalin would sometimes attend the trials in person, concealed at the back of the room, to watch with a growing sense of satisfaction. After a guilty verdict was delivered, the death penalty was carried out.

Show trials had been used before, most notably during the Shakhty Trial of 1928, when managers and technical experts had been put on trial for holding back the process of industrialisation. Then it had been used to send a message to workers throughout the Soviet Union: lack of commitment to the policy of the Party would not be tolerated. The show trials of the 1930s served as a further warning to Party members, even those at the top.

SOURCE 4 Police photos of Gregory Zinoviev after his arrest in 1936.



The purges widen

As the 1930s progressed, Stalin used further purges to strengthen his hold over organisations that posed a threat to the Party's dominance:

- **Purges in the Red Army** in 1937 and 1938 saw an extensive purge of personnel. Three out of the five marshals were purged, 14 out of 16 army commanders and 35,000 officers were either shot or imprisoned. The navy lost every one of its admirals during the purge. The armed forces had been critical of the demoralising impact of collectivisation on the peasantry who made up the bulk of the soldiers. For Stalin, these criticisms were of concern due to the growth in the army's importance alongside the increase in defence resources in the 1930s. The power of the army leaders had to be cut down to size and their loyalty enforced.
- **The purge of the secret police**. With the purges, the amount of work generated for the secret police also grew, as did their influence. To ensure that the secret police posed no threat to Stalin, the purgers were themselves purged. In 1936, Yagoda, the head of the NKVD, was replaced by Nikolai Yezhov, known as the 'bloody dwarf'. Yezhov oversaw the most excessive phase of the purges including purging over 3,000 of his own personnel in his first six months as head of the secret police. Yet the 'Yezhovschina', as it became known, was to come to an end when he himself was dismissed in 1938. His arrest in early 1939 was partly due to Stalin's need for a scapegoat for the excesses of the purges, which were coming to an end.

Although the higher levels of the Party suffered the most, there were sweeping purges at local level too. Stalin went to the trouble of reading lists of those to be arrested, adding names on occasions or adding the comment that more victims were needed. A quota system was used, whereby each Party branch had its own target to meet. Nonetheless, the sheer scale of the purges suggests that there were factors at work other than Stalin himself. Denunciations of Communist officials were partly driven by a sense of justice, sometimes personal hatred. These tensions led to the purge of large numbers of Party members. In this situation, Stalin and the leadership sometimes found it difficult to assert their authority.

The purges played a significant role in the process by which Stalin removed his political opponents, and indeed anyone who could be considered a threat to his power. Stalin's agents caught up with Trotsky in 1940, when he was assassinated with an ice pick in Mexico.

Stalin had imposed a firm grip on the Party through fear and intimidation. To Trotsky it marked Stalin's betrayal of the Revolution; that a dictatorship of Stalin had replaced a dictatorship of the proletariat. However, Stalin could argue that the use of terror actually prevented a conservative reaction and kept the revolutionary spirit alive. The purges safeguarded not only the power of Stalin but also the position of the Communist Party. The Communists had always been a minority party and, as such, needed to employ terror to retain power when undertaking unpopular policies. What is striking is that the Great Terror was launched at a time when the Party's position appeared relatively secure. This would seem to indicate that Stalin was working to his own agenda, trying to secure his own personal position rather than that of the Party. In this sense, Stalin's use of terror differed from that of Lenin's. What Stalin did owe to the work of Lenin was the attitude of many Party members that had developed during the civil war – that terror was an acceptable method of dealing with opponents both within and outside the Party.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

Stalin's use of terror

1 What were the similarities and differences between Lenin's system of government and that of Stalin?

2 Who relied most on the use of terror: Lenin or Stalin?

AS Level Exam-Style Question Section A

How far did Stalin's use of terror during the 1930s differ from that of Lenin's? (20 marks)

Tip

Do not forget to make direct comparisons between Stalin's and Lenin's use of terror. Think about the ways in which they were similar and different.

THINKING HISTORICALLY Causation (3c&d)

Causation and intention

1 Work on your own or with a partner to identify as many causes of the Great Purge of the 1930s as you can. Write each cause on a separate card or piece of paper.

2 Divide your cards into those that represent:

a) the actions or intentions of people

b) the beliefs held by people at the time

c) the contextual factors or events (that is, political, social or economic events)

d) states of affairs (long- or short-term situations that have developed in particular ways).

3 Focus on the intentions and actions of the key people in the run-up to the Great Purge. For each person, draw on your knowledge to fill in the table below, identifying:

a) their intentions

b) the actions they took to achieve these

c) the consequences of their actions (both intended and unintended)

d) the extent to which their intentions were achieved.

Key figure	Intentions in 1930s	Actions taken	Consequences	How far intention achieved
Josef Stalin	To secure power as leader of the Soviet Union. To remove opposition to his policies. To strengthen the Soviet Union against foreign attack.	Used murder of Kirov to accuse Left of the Party of plotting with Trotsky to undermine the Soviet Union. Arrests of opponents in the Party and armed forces.	Removal of political opponents in the Politburo. (intended) Stalin's economic policies implemented without opposition. (intended) Triggered a snowball effect of purges at local level. (unintended)	Short term – Stalin emerged as an unchallenged dictator. Support for his policies was achieved through fear. However, the purges removed some of the Soviet Union's most able army officers and resulted in disruption of the economy. Led to distancing of foreign powers from the USSR at a time when the threat of Nazi Germany was growing. (unintended) Long term – The USSR was strong enough to defeat Nazi Germany in the Second World War, but lasting fear of terror prevented new initiatives being put forward after the war and led to long-term stagnation.
Leonid Nikolayev				
Genrikh Yagoda (Head of the Secret Police)				
Nicolai Yezhov				
Local Party officials				

4 Discuss the following questions with a partner:

a) Did any one party intend for the Great Purge to become so widespread in the 1930s?

b) How important are people's intentions in explaining the scale of the Great Purge?

Stalin's power over party and state

There is no doubt that Stalin had considerable control over the Communist Party and the Soviet Union, building on the foundations of power laid by Lenin. Trotsky's accusation that Stalin's Soviet Union was a personal dictatorship is supported by evidence regarding the level of control Stalin exerted.

Stalin's control over the Communist Party

In 1924, the Politburo was made up of the following members: Bukharin, Zinoviev, Kamenev, Rykov, Tomsky, Trotsky and Stalin. By the end of 1930 Stalin was the only surviving member from this group, the others had been removed during the disputes over economic policy in the late 1920s. In their place were cronies of Stalin, such as Molotov, Voroshilov, Kalinin and Lazar Kaganovich. Thus, Stalin was able to ensure the Politburo was in agreement with his own policies. The use of terror against previous opponents sent clear messages to members of the Politburo about the likely consequences of opposing Stalin's wishes.

The key consequence of Stalin's methods was the failure of political institutions within the Soviet Union to gain any real power. All Party and State institutions remained mechanisms for rubber-stamping official policies decided by the leadership, and the leadership meant Stalin.

The way the government and Party functioned reflected Stalin's growing control:

- As the 1930s went on, these institutions, including the Politburo, met less frequently as Stalin increased his control over them. In the 1920s, the Politburo had met weekly, but by the mid-1930s meetings were held only about nine times a year.
- Power became focused in subgroups set up outside the Politburo, over which Stalin could exercise firmer control.
- Stalin attended important meetings, where he would use the intimidating tactic of walking around the room while others spoke. There was a real fear that saying something disagreeable to Stalin would result in execution. This was the fate of Pavel Rychagov, commander of the Soviet air force, when he complained about the quality of Soviet aircraft.

Lenin could be forceful, but Stalin's style of intimidation was unique.

SOURCE 5 Stalin (third from right) arriving at the Seventeenth Party Congress, 1934. Molotov is on his right, Kalanin and Yezhov to his left.



The Soviet Constitution of 1936

The working of the new Constitution of 1936 illustrates the failure of democratic institutions to develop, despite official statements given by the government. At face value, the Constitution seemed to be highly democratic. Stalin himself stated: 'the constitution of the USSR is the only thoroughly democratic constitution in the world'. Every citizen in the USSR was to be given the vote. This was an important change from the situation that had existed before 1936, where 'bourgeois' classes such as the **kulaks** and priests were denied the vote. The Constitution stated that, since these classes no longer existed, there was no reason to deny any citizen the right to vote. Civil rights, including freedom of the press, religion and organisation, were given under the Constitution. There was also a guarantee of employment that contrasted with the economic situation in many capitalist countries at the time, suffering as they were from the effects of the Great Depression of the 1930s.

KEY TERM

Kulak
A group of peasants who owned their own farm, usually a smallholding. They were usually slightly richer than those peasants who did not own land but worked as farm labourers.

In practice, the Constitution was a fraud. It listed restrictions on the rights of citizens and it was clear that nothing could threaten the dominance of the Communist Party. Democracy was imposed from above and limited by the leadership. Only candidates from the Communist Party were allowed to stand in elections. The government announced that political parties in the democratic sense were a product of conflicts between classes, which were generated by capitalism. The Soviet Union did not need more than one political party because these conflicts no longer applied to the Soviet Union.

The wording of the Constitution was directed at foreign governments as well as Soviet citizens. It aimed to convince countries, such as Britain and France, that the USSR had democratic credentials. This would make them good allies in the fight against Nazi Germany. The reality of the Great Purge convinced few observers of the Constitution's claims.

Limits on Stalin's power

Before accepting the view of Stalin as an all-powerful dictator, it is important to consider the limits of his control.

Personal limits Even if he had wished to, Stalin would not have been able to decide and control every issue. Stalin may have read long into the night, but it was impossible for him to survey all the material necessary to keep on top of events in a country as large as the Soviet Union. This situation required Stalin to prioritise and focus on those issues he was most concerned about.

Limits imposed from within the leadership After the removal of the Left and Right Opposition groups during the debate over industrialisation, it is tempting to see the Politburo of the 1930s as a collection of Stalin's cronies. They are often portrayed as dull, mediocre yes-men. There is undoubtedly a lot of truth in this view. Molotov remained loyal to Stalin even when his wife was imprisoned during the purges. However, there is some evidence of the Politburo opposing Stalin's actions.

- When Stalin wanted to execute Ryutin, who had denounced Stalin in 1932, the Politburo refused to agree and Ryutin was sentenced to ten years in a labour camp.
- Stalin's ambitious targets for the Second Five-Year Plan were considered too high by many both inside and outside the Party. Even members of the Politburo felt the Plan, as it stood, would result in chaos and opposition. Stalin was forced to accept a hurried redrafting of the Plan with lower targets.
- Kirov, the popular leader of the Party in Leningrad and a member of the Politburo, may have represented a moderate faction within the leadership. He had secured more votes than Stalin in the elections to the Central Committee at the Party Congress of 1934. Did Kirov represent growing opposition to Stalin's policies?
- Some members of the Politburo expressed concern over Stalin's increasing use of brutality. Kuibyshev, head of **Gosplan,** may have expressed these concerns to Stalin but he died of a heart attack in 1935. Ordzhonikidze, **Commissar** for Heavy Industry, raised objections to the use of terror during meetings of the Politburo. Stalin tried to unnerve him by arresting and shooting his deputy. Ordzhonikidze cracked under the pressure: his cause of death in 1937 was officially given as a heart attack, but he was widely believed to have committed suicide. Other doubters included Voroshilov and Kalinin, both of whom became isolated in the Politburo.

KEY TERMS

Gosplan
The State Planning Authority, an organisation that was run by the Communist Party. It was given the task of planning the industrialisation of the USSR under the Five-Year Plans. Gosplan set targets for industries and allocated resources.

Commissar
A top government official, in charge of a specific area of policy.

Politics within the soviet leadership remained a secretive process and evidence of relationships within the Politburo is difficult to find and interpret. The evidence available suggests that the limits imposed on Stalin by members of the Politburo were minor, and reduced as the 1930s wore on, yet they showed that some dissatisfaction with Stalin did exist and could, on rare occasions, make itself known. Stalin surrounded himself with his cronies, but to serve Stalin's purpose they needed to be able to exercise the power Stalin had given them. This allowed some of Stalin's gang to develop their own agenda and Yezhov, head of the secret police, seems to have done this when implementing arrests and executions during the Great Terror.

Limits imposed from below Stalin's policies may have been imposed on the Party, but not always against their will. Party members were concerned about the continuing threat from enemies at home and abroad and pushed for policies that would strengthen socialism in the USSR. Thus, Stalin can be seen as merely following the wishes of rank and file Party members in bringing about the rapid industrialisation of the country. Overenthusiastic Party members were in danger of pushing events further than Stalin wished.

In 1930, Stalin issued a statement that castigated those Party members who were 'dizzy with success' in implementing the policy of collectivisation overzealously. There is also evidence of the purges at local level resulting from conflict between local Party members and regional authorities. Stalin may have directed the purges at the top, but their scale at local level was determined by local pressures over which Stalin found it difficult to exercise control.

Although there were limits to Stalin's power, it is difficult to deny the importance of Stalin's control over the government. There were trends evident under Lenin that contributed to the growth of Stalin's power: the growth of the bureaucracy, the failure of political institutions to develop and the use of terror. It is tempting to see Stalin's dictatorship as a product of the structures laid down after the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. Despite this, it would be misleading to see Stalinism as the inevitable consequence of Leninism. There were important differences, the most significant being the move away from a dictatorship of the proletariat towards a personal dictatorship that served Stalin's own purposes. Stalin was both a product of the situation inherited from Lenin and a force for using the opportunities presented in order to strengthen the system for his own advantage.

Stalin's power over the Party during the Second World War between 1941 and 1945

The German invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941 was the start of a bitter and ferocious struggle. It required effective organisation of both military and civilian resources to meet the German threat. The co-ordination of the country's administration during the war was undertaken by the State Defence Committee (GKO). The military were co-ordinated through the Supreme Command (*Stavka*). It was an administrative system that worked well for the duration of the war. The use of terror reduced and some generals, such as Zhukov, and ex-Party officials were released from the labour camps so that their expertise could be used for the war effort. The Party used propaganda that often appealed to Russian nationalism to mobilise the masses for the war effort. This propaganda had the effect of increasing Stalin's power as he was presented as a symbol of unity.

When the Germans invaded at dawn on 22 June, Stalin was so shocked that he seems to have suffered a breakdown. He retired to his *dacha* (country villa) for several days, leaving communication with the front confused, until coaxed into action by Molotov. Nonetheless, Stalin was to emerge from the Second World War as a hero to the Soviet people. Soviet victory was often attributed to his firm action in the face of the Nazi threat.

High Stalinism, 1945–53

The last years of Stalin's rule were concerned with reconstruction after the Second World War and showed several trends in the power of Stalin and of the Party.

The Party leadership moved quickly to reassert its authority after the slight relaxation of control that had occurred during the war. Terror was used to reinforce control as concessions, such as those given to the Orthodox Church, were withdrawn.

In 1949, Stalin celebrated his 70th birthday during which there was a wave of admiration. The cult of personality gave Stalin the façade of enormous power, but his health had been in decline since the war and those around him were engaged in rivalry for power and influence. Stalin increasingly relied on political scheming to divide potential rivals to his power and minimise their threat to his position.

Immediately after the war the old guard of Stalin's associates, such as Molotov and Kaganovich, found themselves eclipsed by the rise of a younger generation within the Party leadership. Among this new generation of Politburo members, the chief rivals were Andrei Zhdanov, Georgy Malenkov and Lavrenti Beria.

The Mingrelian Affair of 1951 involved a purge of the Party in Georgia that removed some of Beria's allies. The purge seemed to be targeted at people who were of Mingrelian nationality, a group to which Beria himself belonged. Stalin's manoeuvring at the Party Congress of 1952 provides another illustration of his tactics for dealing with his subordinates. The Politburo, renamed the *presidium*, was enlarged from 10 to 36 members. This allowed Stalin to bring in relative newcomers like Leonid Brezhnev and Nikolai Ignatev who had no links with Malenkov or Beria. Yet Stalin's weakness is revealed by the fact that he was unable to sack those who supported Beria and Malenkov; some were actually promoted.

There is evidence that Stalin was planning another major purge in 1953, in the months before he died. In January, a group of doctors were arrested, accused of trying to assassinate the leadership. The 'Doctors' Plot' may have been the prelude to a campaign of terror against Soviet Jews, but it was more likely to have been the first step towards the elimination of Beria, and possibly other figures in the leadership. Certain statements that accused the secret police of a lack of vigilance must have concerned its head, Beria. Before the purge could take place, Stalin died.

Stalin's power within the leadership had been in decline since 1945. He could no longer command his subordinates and he could only maintain his position through the use of intrigue and terror.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

Stalin's power as Soviet leader

When was Stalin at his most powerful as leader of the Soviet Union? Justify your decision.

SOURCE 6 Passage describing the personality of Stalin, taken from the book *Khrushchev Remembers*, written by Stalin's successor as Soviet leader, Nikita Khrushchev, in 1971.

Stalin's character was brutish, and his temper was harsh; but his brutishness didn't always imply malice toward people to whom he acted so rudely. His was a sort of inborn brutishness. He was coarse and abusive with everyone. I often experienced his rudeness myself. Stalin liked me. If he hadn't liked me or if he had felt the slightest suspicion toward me, he could have gotten rid of me anytime he pleased in the same way he got rid of so many people who were undesirable to him. More than once, after being rude or spiteful to me, he would express his goodwill. But God forbid that there should have been any kind of apology!

... Stalin allowed himself to insult and abuse those closest to him...

It happened in the last year of his life. Stalin had invited us all to the nearby Dacha to celebrate the New Year with him...

He said, 'Well, go on, Svetlanka [affectionate form of Svetlana], dance! You're the hostess, so dance!'

She said, 'I've already danced, Papa, I'm tired.' With that, Stalin grabbed her by the forelock of her hair with his fist and pulled. I could see her face turning red and tears welling up in her eyes. I felt so sorry for Svetlanka. He pulled harder and dragged her back onto the dance floor.

... [Vasily, Stalin's son]... was an undisciplined student and brought Stalin much grief. I think Stalin used to whip him regularly.

SOURCE 7 An extract from the memoirs of Stalin's daughter, Svetlana Alliluyeva, taken from the book, *Twenty Letters to a Friend*, published in 1967. Here she is describing Stalin's position in 1947.

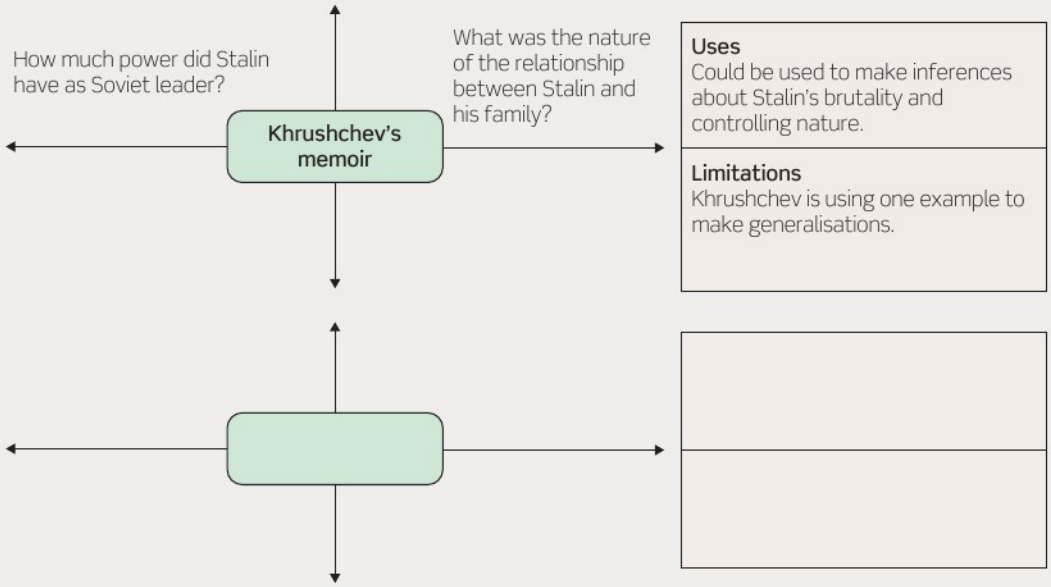
All-powerful as he was, he was impotent in the face of the frightful system that had grown up around him like a huge honeycomb and he was helpless either to destroy it or bring it under control. General Vlasik laid out millions in my father's name. He spent it on new houses and trips by enormous special trains, for example. Yet my father was unable even to get a clear explanation how much money was being paid out, where, and to whom.

THINKING HISTORICALLY Evidence (3a)

The value of evidence

Read the evidence from Nikita Khrushchev (Source 5) and Svetlana Alliluyeva (Source 6) about Stalin, then work through the tasks that follow.

1. Write down at least three ways in which Khrushchev's memoir is useful as evidence of Stalin's power as Soviet leader, and three ways in which Svetlana Alliluyeva's memoir is useful.
2. Compare your answers with a partner then try to come up with at least two limitations of each source as evidence of Stalin's power as Soviet leader.
3. Discuss with a partner whether you think Khrushchev or Alliluyeva provides more useful evidence of Stalin's power as Soviet leader.
4. What if the sources were used to answer the question 'What was the nature of the relationship between Stalin and his family?' Complete the diagrams below to show the usefulness and limitations of the two sources for this question and for two questions of your own.



A Level Exam-Style Question Section A

To what extent did Stalin's power over the Party change between 1928 and 1953? (20 marks)

Tip

Make sure you focus on the key word 'change'. Assess aspects that changed against aspects that stayed the same. Discuss the nature of the change, for example was the change fundamental, partial or superficial?

TO WHAT EXTENT DID THE NATURE OF COMMUNIST PARTY RULE CHANGE AFTER THE DEATH OF STALIN UP TO 1985?

Developments after the death of Stalin showed that, for any change to occur, the impetus would have to come from the leadership itself. Reforms were to follow under Khrushchev to remove the worst features of the Stalinist system, but they threatened to reduce the power of officials within the Party structure as well. Khrushchev's replacement, Leonid Brezhnev, preferred to trust Party officials in their responsibilities. This approach provided stability but at a cost of growing stagnation. The regime was based on Party structures, whose personnel were keen to preserve their own status, and the system was to prove increasingly inflexible when faced with the prospect of change.

Khrushchev's attempts to reform government and de-Stalinisation

The succession

When Stalin died in 1953, members of the Politburo (renamed the *presidium* in 1952) formed a collective leadership. The main players were Beria, Malenkov and Khrushchev. Initially it was Beria who seemed to be leading developments. Although he was head of the secret police, which was clearly a worry to his rivals, Beria moved quickly to reduce the use of terror. An amnesty was issued on 27 March 1953, which released a million prisoners, mainly criminals on short sentences, from labour camps. The Doctors' Plot was denounced as false and the Kremlin doctors arrested by Stalin were released. Despite these developments, Malenkov and Khrushchev feared the man who controlled the apparatus of terror. In June, Beria was arrested, accused of being a British spy and executed. It was an illegal act, but one the *presidium* members felt necessary to restore '**socialist legality**', which was now to be the key word of government.

In September, Khrushchev became First Secretary of the Communist Party (the title replaced that of General Secretary) and he used the position to place his allies in the *presidium*. He also paid particular attention to the composition of the Central Committee, which was given more authority over both the government and Party structures. Almost half of those elected to the Central Committee in 1952 were removed and most of the new members were supporters of Khrushchev. In this way, Khrushchev had outmanoeuvred his main opponents by 1956.

KEY TERM

Socialist legality
The principle that the action of the government and Party organisations was subject to the law. This was particularly aimed at curbing the actions of the secret police to stop them carrying out arbitrary arrests.

The 'Secret Speech' of 1956 and de-Stalinisation

In 1956, at the Twentieth Party Congress, Khrushchev felt confident enough to give a speech that criticised Stalin. Party members were shocked to hear Khrushchev accuse Stalin of developing a cult of personality, acting as a tyrant, using unnecessary terror and making economic mistakes. These criticisms glossed over the fact that the Politburo contained Party members, including Khrushchev, who had risen through the ranks by implementing Stalin's policies.

For Khrushchev, the Soviet system needed to be rejuvenated by a return to the legality of Leninism. Khrushchev's reforms were to become known as de-Stalinisation and Khrushchev was careful to ensure that attention was focused on Stalin and not the Soviet system itself. Key features of de-Stalinisation included the following.

- Regular meetings of the *presidium* and the Central Committee resumed.
- Moves were made to decentralise decision-making by giving more power to organisations at regional level.
- Party and government officials no longer faced prison for failing to meet targets.
- The secret police were brought firmly under Party control. They could no longer be used by an individual to further their own interests.
- The secret police lost control over the labour camps, whose economic resources had bolstered the power of the organisation.
- Two million political prisoners were released from the camps between 1953 and 1960. This was a significant number, but the process was often slow and only four percent of those who appealed for release on political grounds had been returned to civilian life by 1955.

These developments were welcomed by the population, but fear did not disappear completely. Heavy punishments remained for corruption, and criticism outside the boundaries laid down by the Party leadership could result in internal exile or removal to a psychiatric hospital. The population was also aware that the secret police had ever more sophisticated methods of surveillance.

SOURCE 8 A statue of Stalin is dismantled as a result of Khrushchev's policy of de-Stalinisation.



The crisis of 1957

The most contentious aspect of de-Stalinisation proved to be Khrushchev's moves to decentralise decision-making. Powers were to be transferred from central ministries to regional councils. This move threatened to reduce the power of Party leaders. In 1957, this resulted in an attempt to remove Khrushchev from power by what Khrushchev later called the 'Anti-Party Group'. This opposition was led by Malenkov and Molotov, who persuaded the *presidium* to ask for Khrushchev's resignation. Khrushchev demanded that the issue go to the Central Committee: it was they, he argued, who had appointed him and therefore only they could dismiss him. It was a cunning move. Packed with his allies, the Central Committee rejected the move. Khrushchev had used his powers as First Secretary to secure his position. This pattern of dealing with rivals echoed that of the rise of Stalin, but there were differences that showed real change had occurred. Khrushchev's rivals were not arrested or executed: Molotov became ambassador to Mongolia; Malenkov was put in charge of electricity.

Khrushchev's power was enhanced in March 1958 when he became prime minister as well as First Secretary. Although he now headed both government and Party, it would be wrong to see Khrushchev as the all-powerful dictator that Stalin had become. Khrushchev's power was subject to the authority of the Central Committee, and debate inside the Party was common.

Khrushchev's reforms of the Party

After surviving the attempt to remove him in 1957, Khrushchev felt confident enough to push ahead with de-Stalinisation. Further reforms were to emerge from the Twenty-Second Party Congress of 1961:

- Stalin's body was removed from Lenin's mausoleum in Red Square.
- There was a major purge of local Party secretaries.
- In 1962, Khrushchev divided the Party into agricultural and industrial departments, a move that reduced the power of Party officials.
- Khrushchev was to introduce a limit to the length Party officials could serve in-post to three years. This measure might have made the Party more responsive to new ideas, but it was a serious threat to the power and privileges of Party officials. Their resentment played an important role in Khrushchev's downfall.

The downfall of Khrushchev, 1964

There were many reasons for the growing unpopularity of Khrushchev: economic mistakes (see Chapter 1.2), the humiliating back-down during the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, his erratic and unpredictable behaviour. Khrushchev was a loose cannon and his conduct often depended on his mood. He had caused a stir in 1960 when he banged his shoe on a desk repeatedly during a debate at the United Nations. His failures in agricultural policy came to a head with a disastrous harvest in 1963 (see Source 9). In the end, it was the Party that removed him from office. In 1964, the Central Committee decided to dismiss Khrushchev from his posts. His reforms had made the bureaucrats in the Party uneasy. Removing Khrushchev was an attempt to preserve their power. However, the fact that Khrushchev could be sacked and retired was a sign of his impact on the Party – it was perhaps his greatest success. As he later remarked, 'Stalin would have had them shot.'

SOURCE 9 An account by Molotov, one of Stalin's cronies. Here he is commenting on Khrushchev's agricultural policies. Molotov had been dismissed by Khrushchev in 1957. From *Molotov Remembers*, published in 1993.

> The development of the virgin lands began prematurely. It was unquestionably an absurd undertaking. On such a large scale it was adventurism... The harvest could neither be stored nor shipped out. It rotted.
>
> ... Khrushchev reminded me of a livestock dealer. A small-time livestock dealer. A man of little culture...
>
> I opposed division of the party into rural and urban branches as contravening both the constitution and the party statutes. All that was sheer idiocy.

EXTEND YOUR KNOWLEDGE

The Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962

The crisis occurred when the USA realised that Khrushchev was helping to build nuclear missile bases in Cuba. Cuba had become communist after Fidel Castro led a revolution there in 1959. US President John F. Kennedy decided to make a stand and placed a quarantine zone around the island to prevent Soviet ships supplying missiles to Cuba. Soviet ships, on their way to Cuba, were turned back by Khrushchev. The action had been in the interests of world peace, but it was viewed by the Soviet armed forces as a humiliating back-down. It was a major factor in the dismissal of Khrushchev in 1964.

THINKING HISTORICALLY Cause and consequence (5a)

Connections

Causes never simply come one after another. They are often present simultaneously and have an effect on one another. Sometimes new causes develop and interact with existing ones.

Failures in economic policy	Khrushchev's attempts to reform the Communist Party	Khrushchev's erratic behaviour as leader	The Cuban Missile Crisis	De-Stalinisation	Disastrous harvest in 1963

Work in groups to produce a diagram of causes and the links between them:

1 On an A3 piece of paper, write all of the causes of the dismissal of Khrushchev in 1964. Write these in boxes, the size of which will reflect how long they were a relevant factor. For example, if you argue that 'Failures in economic policy' had been an important factor early in Khrushchev's rule, then this will be quite a big box, whereas the 'Disastrous harvest of 1963' would be a lot smaller. Spread these boxes around the page.

2 Then make links between all of the causes. Draw lines between the boxes and annotate them to explain how the causes are connected and in what ways each affected and altered the other. For example, between 'Khrushchev's erratic behaviour as leader' and 'The Cuban Missile Crisis' you could write something like, 'The Cuban Missile Crisis highlighted Khrushchev's erratic behaviour because he had been reckless.'

Answer the following questions:

3 How do the causes differ in their nature? (Think in terms of events, developments, beliefs, states of affairs, and so on.)

4 How do the causes differ in the roles they played in causing Khrushchev's dismissal? (Think about whether each cause created the right conditions, was a trigger for events, or acted in some other way.)

5 Write a 200-word paragraph explaining how important it is to recognise the relationships between causes. Give examples from your diagram. Try to include connective phrases such as: 'this created conditions conducive to...', 'this triggered an immediate reaction...', 'this made the development of that situation more/less likely'.

The return to stability under Brezhnev, 1964–82

Khrushchev's replacement as General Secretary was Leonid Brezhnev, a Party man who was seen as a safe pair of hands. It was a sign of the Party reasserting itself over the leadership. Initially Brezhnev was one of a group of leaders but, as Khrushchev had done before him, Brezhnev moved to consolidate his hold on power. Brezhnev was aware that Khrushchev had been removed because he had lost the trust of his colleagues, so he was cautious to avoid making the same mistake. Potential rivals within the Politburo (the *presidium* reverted to its old name in 1966) were sidelined: Nikolai Podgorny was given the largely ceremonial post of Head of State; Alexander Shelepin was put to task on foreign affairs.

It is easy to underestimate Brezhnev. He was at best mediocre, if not talentless, as his rivals often claimed. However, he was not without charm; his affable personality allowed him to get his way without causing conflict. Ultimately, he was an 'organisation' man and his skills at placating competing Party leaders were good enough to give the Politburo a sense of unity.

Brezhnev quickly reversed those aspects of de-Stalinisation that had upset the Party as many of Khrushchev's reforms were labelled 'hare-brained schemes' and abolished.

- The division of the Party into agricultural and industrial sections was dropped.
- Limits on tenure of office were removed.
- The guiding principles were to be collective leadership and '**trust in cadres**'. The chief result of these principles was that most Party officials, including those at the top, were to enjoy long, unbroken tenures in their jobs. As the Party became the main instrument of upward mobility, its membership grew from 6.9 million in 1953 to 17 million by 1980. The Party could at least claim some success in widening mass participation in politics.
- There would be no more 'subjectivism', that is, decisions would no longer be made by the leader without consulting the Party. Brezhnev had emerged as 'first among equals' by 1966, but he constantly consulted his colleagues and used an inner core of the Politburo to discuss important issues. He used his position as General Secretary to ensure members of the Politburo got the 'right' information. This helped smooth out divisions. Brezhnev was prepared to retain some of those who might be rivals: Kosygin remained prime minister despite the fact that the two men hated each other.
- The Soviet Constitution of 1977 enshrined the right of citizens to criticise incompetent and ineffective Party secretaries, but posts within both Party and government were filled by appointment rather than genuine election. Article 6 of the Constitution asserted the primacy of the Communist Party over the state. This, according to the constitution, was 'mature socialism'.

KEY TERM

Trust in cadres
A reference to Brezhnev's principle of letting Party members (cadres), who served in official posts at all levels, get on with their job without interference.

These moves brought an end to the most radical elements of de-Stalinisation. There was even a limited recognition of the centenary in 1979 of Stalin's birth. Yet there was no return to the widespread use of terror witnessed under Stalin. Brezhnev preferred to ignore 'the Stalin question' in the name of stability. The Twenty-

Third Party Congress of 1966 involved so little discussion that it was referred to as 'the congress of silences'. The only change made was to rename the *presidium* the Politburo and the First Secretary the General Secretary. Rather than reverse de-Stalinisation wholesale, the approach became more cautious and conservative.

Brezhnev liked the trappings of power. He awarded himself numerous medals for rather dubious achievements: the Lenin Peace Prize, the Lenin Prize for Literature and so on. He also enjoyed some of the luxuries life at the top could offer. He developed a taste for hunting and for collecting Western limousines. His mother once commented, after he showed her his collection: 'What will you do if the Bolsheviks return to power?' Despite the symbols of power, Brezhnev exercised less personal power than either Stalin or Khrushchev. He lacked the ability to deal with detail, often leaving this to others. He preferred to trust Party comrades and let them get on with their jobs. The resulting stability made Brezhnev a popular leader, but it also led to stagnation.

EXTEND YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Soviet humour

The topics of Soviet humour provide an interesting barometer of public attitudes towards the Soviet leadership. Lenin commanded enormous respect and jokes about him were rare. Jokes about Stalin reflected the fear he instilled in the Soviet population. For example:

> First rabbit: Why have you fled Russia?
>
> Second rabbit: Stalin is preparing a bear hunt.
>
> First rabbit: But you are not a bear.
>
> Second rabbit: I know, but I can't prove it.

Jokes about Khrushchev often made fun of his lack of ability and rash behaviour and reflect the fact that he was not always able to command respect. For example:

> Someone got 25 years in prison for saying Khrushchev was an idiot: 5 years for insulting the leader and 20 years for revealing state secrets.

Brezhnev was a constant source of jokes, many of which he told himself. They indicate that respect for the Soviet leadership had declined. This did much to undermine the authority of the leader. Many jokes made fun of Brezhnev's vanity.

> Where was the epicentre of the last earthquake?
>
> Under the clothes-hanger that Brezhnev's parade tunic fell off.

Brezhnev's successor, Yuri Andropov, did little to restore the authority of the leadership. When it became known that he was ill and reliant on dialysis, a common joke was that Andropov was the most switched on man in the Kremlin.

Konstantin Chernenko, who briefly led the USSR, was well known for his limited intellectual abilities, and jokes often centred on this. For example:

> Someone broke into the Kremlin last night and stole all the books. Comrade Chernenko is devastated. He had not finished colouring them in.

By the early 1980s, Soviet humour revealed that the authority of the leadership was not what it had been.

Growing political stagnation

By 1980, the Party structures that had developed under Stalin were so entrenched that the system was difficult to change even when there was the will to do so. Under Brezhnev, the Party leadership had developed into an **oligarchy**. The General Secretary was the most powerful oligarch. Brezhnev had ensured the promotion of his old colleagues from his time as Party boss in Ukraine. This led others in the Party to refer to the development of the 'Dnepropetrovsk mafia', a group of Brezhnev's old cronies. The other major players in the Politburo all had their own networks in the Party through the ministries they controlled: Kosygin (Chairman of the Council of Ministers), Suslov (Party ideology chief) and Shelepin (former boss of the KGB) were among the most powerful. In the words of historian Figes, 'The Brezhnev system was a coalition of Politburo oligarchs. What united them was the preservation of the status quo.'

KEY TERM

Oligarchy
Rule by a small elite who govern in their own interests. It is often applied to the way the Communist Party ruled the USSR under Brezhnev, Andropov and Chernenko.

EXTEND YOUR KNOWLEDGE

The Dnepropetrovsk mafia

As Soviet leader, Brezhnev relied on colleagues he had worked with earlier in his career, especially while in Dnepropetrovsk in Ukraine. Although they were of mediocre talent, these cronies were loyal to Brezhnev and he used them to strengthen his position against more independent Politburo members. Leading members of this so-called 'Dnepropetrovsk mafia' were as follows.

Andrei Kirilenko
Born 1906. Had served under Brezhnev in Moldavia and was promoted to Brezhnev's position in Dnepropetrovsk in 1950. Under Brezhnev's leadership he was given a key job in the Secretariat. Elected to the Politburo in 1962.

Nikolai Shchelokov
Born 1910. Served with Brezhnev in Dnepropetrovsk. Promoted by Brezhnev in 1966 to become Soviet Minister of Internal Affairs.

Konstantin Chernenko
Born in 1911. Served with Brezhnev in Moldavia and Dnepropetrovsk. Candidate member of Politburo in 1977. Elected to the Politburo in 1978.

The system of promoting people within the Party illustrated the development of oligarchies. Before the 1970s, promotions usually involved moving to another part of the Soviet Union to gain experience and spread new ideas. Under Brezhnev, promotions were usually made from within the ranks of the local Party membership after serving time in a junior position. This move severely limited innovation and change within the system.

This system also allowed corruption to go unnoticed, particularly in the remoter parts of the USSR. The 'cotton affair', only exposed later under Gorbachev, resulted in millions of roubles being claimed for non-existent cotton as officials fiddled the figures. Nepotism was also rife as party officials ensured jobs were given to family members.

By the early 1980s, the Soviet Union gave the impression of being a vast system grinding to a halt, much like the elderly Brezhnev. The Soviet leadership was becoming a 'gerontocracy', as rule was placed in the hands of an increasingly aged group of geriatrics. Membership of the Central Committee illustrated this development.

At Stalin's last party Congress, only 56 percent of the Central Committee was retained in office; in 1976, this figure reached 79 percent and many of those not 'retained' had died from old age. By 1984, seven of the 11 members of the Politburo were over the age of 70. Practicalities were changed to reflect this: Politburo meetings now lasted less than 40 minutes.

Brezhnev's final years were marked by an increasing loss of control that was symbolised by his lack of control over his own family. His daughter Galina was involved in an affair with Boris 'the Gypsy', who had links with diamond smuggling. One of the people with a large file on Brezhnev was Yuri Andropov, the head of the KGB. When Brezhnev died in 1982, the Politburo chose Andropov as his successor.

Although a man of the generation who had risen through the Party during Stalin's years, Andropov recognised the need for reform. His main concern was corruption within the Party, but attempts to deal effectively with this were hampered by his lack of charm. He was also too ill to follow through his ideas. After mid-1983, he was reliant on a kidney dialysis machine and he died in February 1984. Whether Andropov would have been more successful in reforming the system had he lived is difficult to gauge, but one important result of his leadership was the promotion of a younger generation of Party members who saw reform as essential. Among this generation was Mikhail Gorbachev, whom Andropov recommended as his successor. Instead, the Politburo, in a desperate act of self-preservation, elected the Party bureaucrat Konstantin Chernenko as General Secretary. Chernenko was in his mid-seventies and was dying of emphysema when he was elected leader. Chernenko was a Brezhnev man and made no changes in his short leadership. He died in March 1985.

SOURCE 10 From D. Volkogonov, *The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Empire*, published by HarperCollins in 1998. Volkogonov was a member of the Soviet army's Political Administration and had access to the Soviet leadership.

> What is remarkable about Andropov is that he continued to conduct policy while he was seriously ill, kept alive by an artificial kidney, yet still in possession of a clear mind and strong will. He knew what he wanted, although he did not always know how best to achieve it...
>
> Brezhnev, who had become senile before his time, had been incapable of functioning in his last years. Now Andropov was terminally ill, and soon it would be Chernenko's turn. Yet there appears to have been no doubt among the leadership that these people could rule the country. Although since Stalin's death it was no longer done to refer to the leader as *vozhd* [the boss], thus endowing him with a supra-governmental aura, in fact attitudes had changed little since Lenin's time. Even in the conspiracy against Khrushchev, the plotters' knees trembled until the last minute. The sanctification of the highest person in the land was an old Bolshevik tradition.

Conclusion

After the death of Stalin the Soviet government changed from a personal dictatorship based largely on terror to an oligarchy of self-serving interest groups within the Communist Party. As terror was reduced under Khrushchev's de-Stalinisation, the Party had to rely on other more subtle methods of control. The dominant mechanism for tying people to the Party and state was to ensure that its ever-growing personnel gained rewards in the form of secure jobs, status and privileges. As the system grew, those within it wished to preserve a system that worked for their benefit.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

Khrushchev and Brezhnev

1 List the main changes that Khrushchev made to the nature of government.

2 What similarities are there between Khrushchev's government and that of Brezhnev?

3 How far did Brezhnev reverse de-Stalinisation?

4 List the main causes of political stagnation between 1964 and 1985. Which of these causes was the most important? Explain your answer.

A Level Exam-Style Question Section A

How far was Khrushchev able to bring about fundamental change to the system of government established by Stalin? (20 marks)

Tip

This question requires careful analysis of Khrushchev's changes and whether they were able to bring about 'fundamental' change. Think about the nature of change. Was it just tinkering with the system or was it substantial change?

ACTIVITY
SUMMARY

Changes in government

Look at the following list of Soviet leaders between 1917 and 1985:

Lenin; Stalin; Khrushchev; Brezhnev; Andropov; Chernenko

1 List these leaders in order of the amount of personal power they had over the USSR. Justify your decision.

2 The following are words that are often used to describe a leader and their style of ruling:

autocratic; dictator; oligarchy; authoritarian; democratic; tyranny

Which words would you use to describe the style of leadership of each of the Soviet leaders?

WIDER READING

General surveys of Soviet History usually provide good coverage of political aspects, but especially useful are:

Figes, O. *Revolutionary Russia 1891–1991*, Penguin (2014)

Hosking, G. *A History of the Soviet Union*, Fontana (1992)

McCauley, M. *The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Union*, Routledge (2007)

Service, R. *A History of Twentieth-Century Russia*, Penguin (1997)

Suny, R. *The Soviet Experiment*, Oxford (1998)

Suny, R. (ed.) *The Structure of Soviet History*, Oxford (2003)

Volkogonov, D. *The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Empire*, HarperCollins (1998)

More detailed studies of developments under individual Soviet leaders, as well as biographies, include:

de Jonge, A. *Stalin*, Fontana/Collins (1986)

Gill, G. *Stalinism*, Macmillan (1990)

McCauley, M. *The Khrushchev Era*, Longman (1995)

McNeal, R. *Stalin: Man and Ruler*, Papermac (1989)

Medvedev, Z. *Andropov*, Blackwell (1984)

Thompson, W. *The Soviet Union under Brezhnev*, Pearson (2003)

1.2 Industrial and agricultural change, 1917–85

KEY QUESTIONS

- How did the government exercise control over the economy between 1917 and 1928?
- What was the impact of the Five-Year Plans and collectivisation under Stalin?
- How far did economic policy change between 1953 and 1985?

INTRODUCTION

When the Bolsheviks took over Russia in October 1917 the economy was in chaos. It had been severely damaged by the First World War and was to be devastated by the civil war that followed. One key dilemma for the Bolsheviks was how to restore the economy and, in the longer term, how to modernise an outdated and inefficient industrial and agricultural system. As communists, the Bolsheviks believed that all aspects of the economy should be in the hands of the workers and peasants themselves. However, this was to prove an ineffective method of ensuring economic progress. Frustrated at the pace of change, Stalin was to launch a series of Five-Year Plans and the **collectivisation** of agriculture. Beginning in 1929, these policies were to transform the Soviet Union, but at an enormous cost. It was only after Stalin died in 1953 that the pace and focus of economic policy changed. Consumer goods received greater attention as the Soviet government tried to bring the material benefits of communism to the population. By 1985, it was evident that this approach had been of only limited success and, worse still, the whole economy was stagnating as growth came to a halt.

KEY TERM

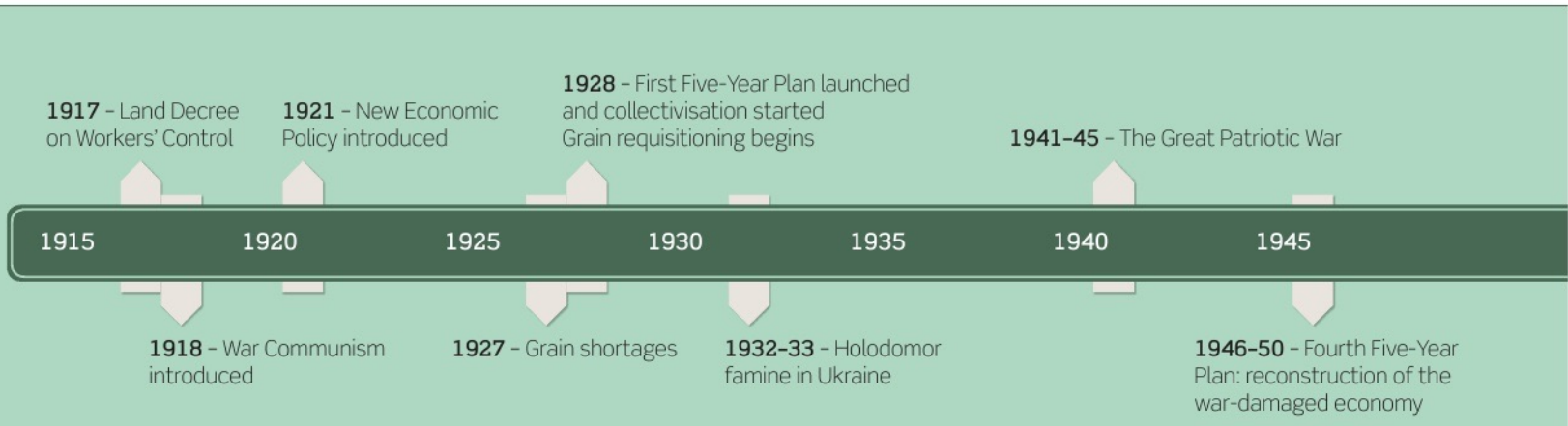
Collectivisation
The policy of creating larger agricultural units where the peasants would farm collectively rather than on individual farms.

HOW DID THE GOVERNMENT EXERCISE CONTROL OVER THE ECONOMY BETWEEN 1917 AND 1928?

SOURCE 1 Lenin, in a declaration issued on 5 November 1917.

> Comrade workers, remember that you yourselves are administering the state. Nobody is going to help you if you do not yourselves unite and take over all state affairs. Rally round your soviets: make them strong. Get to work right there, at the grass roots, without waiting for orders. Institute rigorous supervision over production and accounting over products.

These words seemed to give encouragement to those who believed that the factories, industries, businesses and farms were now in the hands of the workers and peasants. The aristocracy and bourgeoisie were now seen as spent forces who would no longer exploit the workers.



Yet these words belied the reality of the situation, as Lenin himself knew. The equal distribution of goods according to need could only be achieved if there were goods to distribute. Thus, the excitement of giving power to the workers and peasants did not fit easily with circumstances. The economy was devastated by the First World War and the chaos unleashed by the Revolution. State control over the economy might limit workers' independence, but it was one way in which the economy could be rejuvenated. Economic policy from 1917 until the launching of the First Five-Year Plan in 1928 was a series of attempts to resolve this key issue. By 1928 Stalin had decided that a **command economy** was the answer.

The nationalisation of industry

Lenin admitted that there was no blueprint for getting from capitalism to socialism and, ultimately, to communism. It would have to be achieved through a period of trial and error. Ideologically, the Bolsheviks wished to see the means of production in the hands of the proletariat but, in reality, the bourgeoisie had expertise in management and technical skills that were desperately needed. Lenin talked of working with these groups, at least initially, until Bolshevik experts could take their place. This transitional phase was termed '**state capitalism**'. There was also the issue of how the Bolshevik Party could retain control when the workers and peasants were often acting on their own initiative and without Bolshevik involvement. Once given power, the workers and peasants might be unwilling to give it up, even to a party that claimed to be working in their interests.

The key measures of Lenin's initial economic policy were as follows.

- The **Land Decree** of October 1917 abolished private ownership of land, which was now to be in the hands of 'the people'. It was a vague statement, but enough to please the peasantry, who viewed the decree as giving them control over the land they farmed and worked.
- The **Decree on Workers' Control** of November 1917 placed control of the factories into the hands of the industrial workers.
- On 27 December, all private banks were nationalised, and, along with the State Bank, amalgamated into the **People's Bank of the Russian Republic**.

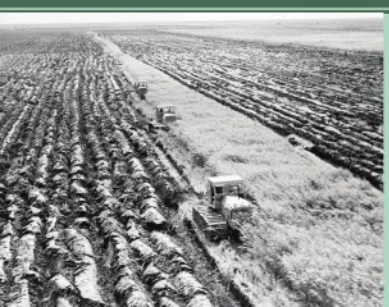
These measures gave considerable power to the workers and peasants, but it had a detrimental effect on the economy. Workers' councils voted to give themselves huge pay rises, which did little to improve production and resulted in inflation. Managers were often dismissed, sometimes violently, and those with industrial and technical expertise were removed by workers seeking revenge for the way they had been treated previously. The Bolsheviks quickly recognised that the government needed to exert greater control over the economy. In December 1917, the Supreme Council of the National Economy (*Vesenkha)* was set up to provide greater supervision of the economy.

This early period, up to the summer of 1918, showed the stresses of an economic policy that was trying to ensure economic growth. There was an obvious tension between worker self-management and government control through central planning. The role of the central government was to be greatly increased during the civil war.

KEY TERMS

Command economy
An economy that is controlled and directed by the state. It is a common feature of communist economies, where many businesses and industries are owned by the state in the interests of the people.

State capitalism
The term given by Lenin to the transitional stage between the old bourgeois economy and a new proletarian one. The idea of state capitalism highlights the tension between placing the economy into Bolshevik hands yet ensuring that economic production returned to the levels it had reached before the First World War. By the middle of 1918, the concept of state capitalism was submerged beneath that of War Communism, the extension of state control that had occurred during the civil war.



1954 – Khrushchev launches Virgin Lands Scheme

1957 – Regional Economic Councils established

1959–65 – Seven-Year Plan: focus on chemicals, light industry and consumer goods

1965 – Kosygin's economic reforms

1982 – Andropov's labour laws

1950 1955 1960 1965 1970 1975 1980

War Communism and the New Economic Policy

Why was War Communism introduced?

Faced with the desperate circumstances of the civil war, the Bolsheviks introduced a series of measures to ensure that the Red Army was supplied with enough food and resources to emerge victorious. These measures entailed much greater government intervention in the economy and collectively became known as War Communism. Historians have long disputed the role of ideological considerations in this development. Did it represent the application of communist principles – or was it prompted largely by the reality of the economic and social chaos produced by the First World War and made worse by the ensuing civil war?

- **The ideological basis**
  The measures of War Communism went along with the long-term aim of the Bolsheviks to abolish private enterprise and could be seen as the application of communist ideology, albeit rather earlier than the Bolsheviks had expected. To some Bolsheviks, the old world had been destroyed by the First World War and this provided an opportunity to build anew on Marxist lines. The collapse of the Russian currency and its replacement by **bartering** was seen by some Bolsheviks as a sign of the liberation from capitalism, when in fact it was caused by raging inflation. The result of this optimism was a radicalisation of policy, pushing the Bolshevik leadership into implementing large-scale nationalisation before it had originally intended to. The nationalisation of all industries with ten or more workers in June 1918 was followed by a series of measures that showed the Bolsheviks were mesmerised by the opportunities that presented themselves to extend government control.
- **The response to the reality of economic collapse**
  There were also, of course, practical reasons for introducing War Communism. The Bolsheviks had inherited an economy that was in a state of near collapse and drastic measures were needed if they were to fight and win the civil war. State direction of the economy had been a key feature of many European countries during the First World War and it had little to do with ideology.
- **A reaction to early Bolshevik excesses**
  In some respects, War Communism was a response to the problems that resulted from the rush of early Bolshevik decrees. Some of the Bolshevik policies for giving control to the workers proved to be idealistic and unworkable, especially during the emergency context of the civil war. The abolition of army ranks was reversed and factory managers had to be used to create some order in industry.

Therefore, there were several factors pushing the government into measures that extended state control.

KEY TERM

Bartering
Paying for goods with other goods rather than money. This system of exchange is usually associated with undeveloped economies or where the system of currency has broken down. During War Communism in Russia, it was seen by some as a sign of liberation from capitalism, but it was in fact a result of economic collapse.

What were the key features of War Communism?

It is tempting to see the measures that made up War Communism as part of a well-planned programme, but in fact it was largely a series of ad hoc responses to the economic and political realities that developed with the onset of civil war. The main features were as follows.

- **Nationalisation** (that is, state ownership) of all industry without compensation. Only workplaces with fewer than ten workers were exempt.
- All industry was placed under the control of the state through the **Supreme Council of National Economy** (*Vesenkha*), set up in 1917.
- The reintroduction of **hierarchical structures in industry**. In factories, the Workers' Councils were replaced by management in order to instil discipline into the workers.
- Harsh **military-style discipline** was introduced into the factories. The death penalty was introduced for all workers who went on strike. The unemployed were forced to join 'Labour Armies' and set to work on projects such as road building and woodland clearance. All workers were expected to volunteer for unpaid work on 'Communist Saturdays', days designated for serving the Party.
- All **private trading was banned**. Trade was to be controlled by the state, but because it could not satisfy demand a large black market in goods developed.
- Transactions using money became limited due to massive inflation. Money was replaced by **bartering** using goods, and many workers received their wages in goods rather than money.

- **The forcible requisitioning of food** from the peasants in order to feed the army and the towns. Around 150,000 Bolshevik volunteers were used to seize grain. The government attempted to use Committees of the Village Poor to spy on any peasants who might be hoarding food. The result was a rise in tension in the countryside and serious outbreaks of violence, often directed at the requisitioning teams. Malnutrition and starvation became commonplace.
- The introduction of **rationing** to ensure that, despite food shortages, the workers in the cities were fed. Those industrial workers whose work was crucial to the war effort received preferential treatment.

War Communism ensured that the Red Army got the resources it needed to fight and win the civil war, but it left the economy in a state of collapse. By 1921, industrial production was only one-fifth of the figure for 1913. Disease and starvation were common and a wave of serious unrest swept across the countryside.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

War Communism

1 What do all the different elements of War Communism share? (Think of the motives behind the measures as a whole.) Make a list.

2 Choose three of the individual measures and explain how they each relate to the overall themes identified in your answer to Question 1.

3 Explain what is meant by the following descriptions of War Communism. For each one use specific measures of War Communism to highlight these key features.

a. Necessary but unpopular.

b. 'A siege economy with a communist ideology. A partly organised chaos.' (Nove, 1992)

c. Agriculture and the countryside were sacrificed on behalf of industry and the cities.

Why was the NEP introduced in 1921?

The Bolsheviks hoped that, through War Communism, communist ideology could be converted into meaningful policy, or at least give them the pretence of doing so. By 1921, these hopes and pretensions were well and truly over. The reality of the social and economic situation, coupled with a worrying deterioration in the political position of the Bolsheviks, led the government to abandon War Communism and replace it with the New Economic Policy (NEP). War Communism may have delivered the resources needed to win the civil war, but it was at a huge cost in terms of its impact on the economy and on the popularity of the Bolsheviks. The ending of the civil war produced a new situation that required a different response from the government.

- **Economic considerations**
  By the end of the war, industry had ground to a virtual standstill. Production of heavy industry had fallen to 20 percent of its 1913 level and, in some sectors, production had stopped altogether. Food production had also fallen, to only 48 percent of the 1913 figure, and the breakdown in the transport and distribution systems had resulted in widespread famine (see Source 2). Weakened by a lack of food, many Russians succumbed to diseases such as typhus and smallpox and over 20 million died from famine and disease in the 1920s. In addition to this, army soldiers had to be resettled into civilian life. It was clear that War Communism was not delivering the goods, nor would it be able to cope with the post-war situation.
- **The unpopularity of War Communism**
  Several of the key features of War Communism were loathed by the Russian population. The system of rationing was disliked, as the size of the rations was dependent on the social classification a person was given. Members of the Red Army and industrial proletariat received the most; members of the bourgeoisie received very little and, in some cases, none at all. The use of managers and the return to hierarchical systems within the factories caused resentment among the industrial workers, leading to violence on occasions. Many workers felt that their opportunity for self-regulation was being undermined by the increasing dictates of the state.

- **The Tambov Rising**
  In the countryside, resentment of War Communism was greatest in relation to the forcible requisitioning of food and the plans to get rid of the ***mir*** (village commune), which had become a genuinely peasant organisation since the Revolution. Peasant resentment against the government came to a head in a series of uprisings in 1920–21. There were risings in the important grain areas of the Volga basin, North Caucasus and Western Siberia. The most serious was the Tambov Rising in central Russia, where peasants reacted violently to requisitioning teams arriving in the area to seize grain. The revolt was only put down after 50,000 Red Army troops were sent into the area. The seriousness of these risings put pressure on the government to change its policy.
- **The Kronstadt Mutiny**
  This revolt by sailors at the naval base outside Petrograd increased pressure on the government. The mutiny alarmed the Bolsheviks because it was by a group that had previously been a mainstay of the Revolution and they could not be easily dismissed as 'counter-revolutionaries'. The mutiny was over the increase in the power of the Party and its officials at the expense of the workers. Its slogan was 'Soviets without Bolsheviks'. The mutiny was suppressed by Red Army troops, but the revolt was a shock to the Bolshevik leadership and was a key factor in Lenin's decision to change his economic policy. To Lenin, the Kronstadt Mutiny had 'lit up reality like a flash of lightning'.

It was clear to most in the Bolshevik Party that the situation that had developed under War Communism could not be sustained. The result was a series of measures, known as the NEP, that saw a move away from the tight state control of War Communism towards a more mixed economy, where a private sector could emerge in addition to that controlled directly by the state.

KEY TERM

Mir
An organisation made up of village elders that controlled the peasants and their agricultural work. After the Revolution of February 1917, the peasants were able to gain genuine control over the working of the *mir* and used this for their own benefit. The Bolsheviks soon came to dislike the *mir* as it provided an obstacle to their own control over the countryside and their aim of introducing collective farms. Under War Communism, the Bolsheviks drew up plans for the removal of the *mir*.

SOURCE 2 The observations of two doctors working in the Ufa region, an area badly affected by famine, in 1920. From *Endurance and Endeavour*, written by J. N. Westwood in 1981.

> Sometimes desperate mothers and fathers feed their children human meat as a last resort. Sometimes a father, seeing no other way, cuts the throat of a neighbour's child and brings it to his children as 'mutton'. Sometimes parents at night seize part of a body from the cemetery and feed it to their children.
>
> A Tartar killed a 13 year old girl, a relative, who had come to visit him, by hitting her over the head with a log. He not only ate her, but also cut off from her several pounds of fat, which he sold at the market.

What were the key features of the NEP?

The NEP was a series of measures, introduced in 1921, which moved away from the tight state control of the economy introduced under War Communism.

In agriculture:

- There was to be an end to requisitioning. It was to be replaced by a system of taxation, which allowed the peasants to sell any remaining food at market for a profit.
- The Bolsheviks also announced that there would be no forced programme of collectivisation. Without collective farms, the *mir* would stay as the means of peasants self-regulating their farming activities.

These measures were clearly a compromise with the peasantry, but the Bolsheviks knew that, without increased food production, the economy would never be able to revive.

In industry:

- The NEP returned small-scale industry to private hands, although the state kept control of heavy industry, transport and the banks. This allowed Lenin to claim that the party still held 'the commanding heights of the economy'.
- In state-owned factories, piecework and bonuses were used to try to raise production. To some Bolsheviks these were the techniques of the capitalist.
- The reintroduction of a currency for paying wages in 1921 was also viewed with suspicion by many communists as the re-emergence of capitalism.
- The legalisation of private trading seemed the logical way of stopping a growing black market, a factor that had already led to some local authorities allowing private trade.
- With the growth of small-scale business and private traders, the Soviet Union saw the development of the so-called '**Nepmen**', people who gained under the NEP.

KEY TERM

Nepmen
A term of abuse used by Bolsheviks to describe those private business people and traders who profited from the NEP.

From a communist standpoint, the NEP, with its acceptance of private industry and private trade, was a retreat back to capitalism. The left-wing Bolsheviks were particularly hostile to this watering down of policy but, to Lenin, the Bolsheviks were in desperate economic circumstances and, without making compromises, the Revolution would not be secure. The NEP was seen by Lenin and his supporters as a short-term remedy. The economy would have to be restored before moving to socialism, as Lenin stated: 'One step backwards, two steps forward'.

The introduction of the NEP coincided with the arrest of many Mensheviks, and all political parties other than the Bolsheviks were outlawed. Economic compromise clearly did not extend to political relaxation, a factor which persuaded many on the left of the Bolshevik Party that the NEP could be tolerated in the short term.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

The NEP

1 Explain how the NEP could be seen as a retreat backwards towards capitalism.

2 Mensheviks believed that Russia was not ready for socialism. In what sense did the Bolsheviks' retreat under the NEP prove that the Mensheviks were right all along?

3 How far would you agree with the view of the left-wing Bolsheviks that the NEP marked a betrayal of the Revolution?

State control of industry and agriculture

The NEP resulted in a mixed economy whereby private ownership coexisted alongside state control, yet the debate over the extent of state control in the Soviet economy, far from ending, intensified during the 1920s. The Bolsheviks considered the NEP to be a temporary measure before moving on to a socialist system with greater state intervention. The issue now arose as to when the NEP should be brought to an end.

SOURCE 3 A thriving street market during the period of the NEP. The stalls are being operated by private traders allowed under the policy.



How successful was the NEP?

One of the key factors that made retaining the NEP so tempting was its very success. Industrial output rose rapidly during the first three years of the NEP. Much of this was due to the repairing of roads and bridges damaged during the civil war and putting existing factories back into production. It was also helped by better harvests in 1922 and 1923 (see Source 4). Yet, much of the growth was also due to enterprising Nepmen, those who saw opportunities under the return of private trade to set up small businesses and make some money. Restaurants and market stalls were particular favourites and an important part of returning life to the cities.

There were some less desirable aspects to the NEP: corruption through a black market flourished, prostitution was widespread, and gangs of children roamed the cities trying their luck stealing and then selling goods. One major problem was the imbalance between agricultural and industrial goods: as food prices fell, the price of industrial goods rose. These low prices for grain discouraged the peasants from growing food for the market, a problem that Trotsky described as the 'scissors crisis' after the figures for prices were plotted on a graph (see Figure 2.1). State intervention was used to resolve this issue. The government stepped in to regulate prices in December 1923.

SOURCE 4 Russian production figures 1913–24 (taken from A. Nove, *An Economic History of the USSR, 1917–1991*).

	1913	1921	1922	1923	1924	1925	1926
Grain (million tons)	81.6	37.6	50.3	56.6	51.4	72.5	76.8
Pig iron (million tons)	4.2	0.1	0.2	0.3	0.75	1.5	2.4
Electricity (million kWhs)	1.9	0.5	0.8	1.1	1.5	2.3	3.5
Steel (million tons)	4.2	0.2	0.4	0.7	1.1	2.1	3.1
Cotton (million metres)	2,582	105	349	691	963	1,688	2,286

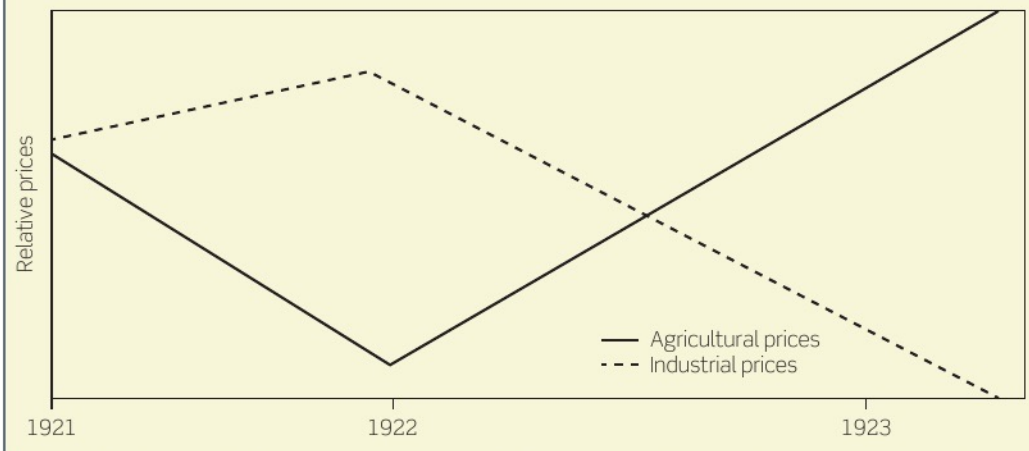


Figure 2.1 The so-called scissors crisis: the result of widening differences between agricultural and industrial prices. Industrial prices rose due to shortages of goods. Agricultural prices reduced as food flooded into cities due to a good harvest. The government became concerned that these low food prices would act as a disincentive to the peasants growing food the following year.

The decision to move to a command economy

By 1924, industrial production was 45 percent of its 1913 figure. By 1926, much of the pre-war economy had been restored. The key to further growth was increasing food production in order to support more industrial workers and gain foreign exchange for new technology and machinery. While Bukharin and Stalin called for a continuation of the NEP, Trotsky and those on the left of the Bolshevik Party called for greater state control over the economy in order to increase the pace of growth. Stalin was able to outmanoeuvre the Left in 1926 and the NEP stayed, but circumstances arose that led Stalin to change his mind.

In 1927, a series of events occurred that raised the spectre of a foreign invasion of the USSR. A raid by the British government on the offices of the Soviet trade mission in London and attacks on the Chinese communists in Shanghai seemed to confirm Soviet fears of an imminent attack on the USSR itself. The Soviet Union would have to be placed on a war footing. Many peasants responded to the fear of invasion by hoarding food and this seemed to confirm to Stalin that the peasantry were a key force in holding back further economic growth.

Soviet production figures were still far below the modern industrial economies of Western Europe. State control under the proposed Five-Year Plan (see below) would enable the government to direct the economy and ensure the adequate production and distribution of essential materials, including the food needed to support industrial and urban growth. With government direction and control, the economic resources of the Soviet Union could be maximised. Since the Communist takeover in 1917, trade with the rest of the world had been severely reduced. The Soviet Union would have to rely on its own resources. State control would ensure these resources were used to their full potential to bring about rapid industrialisation.

There was a political dimension to the decision to extend state control over the economy. Greater state control would remove the Nepmen and kulaks, who had become richer through the compromises of the NEP. The Five-Year Plan, with its large-scale nationalisation and state control, would get rid of these groups detested by many Communist Party members. Moving away from the NEP also gave Stalin an opportunity to consolidate his hold over the Party leadership. Having removed the Left in 1926, he could now act against the Right. The Right, led by Politburo members Bukharin, Tomsky and Rykov, were in favour of retaining the NEP, arguing that forcing peasants onto collectives would actually lead to a decline in food production. By 1928, Stalin argued that the NEP should go because, as a result of a compromise with the peasantry over their desire to farm as they wished, it was holding back the industrialisation of the Soviet Union. The launching of the Five-Year Plan saw the effective removal of the leaders of the Right in early 1929, as well as the extension of the state, through party-controlled planning agencies. These were instruments of Stalin's increasingly dominant power.

By 1928, it was clear to all that Lenin's declaration of 1917 that the workers were now in charge of their own factories and workplaces had been a naive and idealistic notion. Workers' control over the economy had proved to be incompatible with industrial efficiency and productivity. It was also a threat to Bolshevik control over the very people they were supposed to represent.

The Bolshevik realisation of these issues had produced, in turn, War Communism as a method of extending state control over an increasingly chaotic economy, and the NEP as a method of kick-starting an economy on the verge of collapse. Both of these policies had succeeded in their aims, but at the expense of either popular support or of the Communist ideals of the Revolution. By 1928, the decision had been made to extend state control and implement a command economy as the best way of bringing about rapid industrialisation, while consolidating the power of the Communist Party.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

The debate over the NEP

As an economic adviser to the Politburo in 1928, write a report that *either* argues for a greater role for the state in the economy *or* argues that the NEP should be retained.

WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE FIVE-YEAR PLANS AND COLLECTIVISATION UNDER STALIN?

The period 1928–41 saw a transformation in the Soviet economy as all aspects of industry and agriculture were brought under state control with the implementation of the Five-Year Plans and collectivisation. The impact of these changes was to be wide-ranging, as the USSR emerged as a modern, industrialised superpower: it was 'Stalin's Revolution'. The human cost of this transformation was enormous.

The Five-Year Plans and industrial change

One of the central aims of the Communist regime in the Soviet Union was to industrialise the country. The Soviet economy had made advances under Lenin's NEP, but the Soviet Union remained economically behind the rest of Europe. Its technology was outdated and could not keep up with the needs of the growing Soviet population.

The Five-Year Plans were designed to break away from the NEP, with its capitalist elements, and bring about rapid industrialisation to modernise the economy and move towards socialism. The move to large-scale nationalisation and state control would get rid of the detested Nepmen, those private business owners and traders who had flourished under the NEP. As people who made a profit from their trade, the Nepmen were seen as capitalists, class enemies who represented a reminder of the old world and its values. Fear of foreign invasion was to lead Stalin to declare, 'We are 50 to 100 years behind the advanced countries. We must make good this distance in 10 years. Either we do it or we shall be crushed.' Thus, to industrialise was patriotic, and this was to form an important part of Stalin's cry of '**Socialism in one country**'.

KEY TERM

Socialism in one country
This was the slogan used to describe the policy of industrialising the USSR and moving towards socialism by using the resources of the Soviet Union. It was put forward by Stalin, who argued against Trotsky's idea of promoting world revolution before industrialising at home.

The implementation of the Five-Year Plans

The decision to abandon the NEP and push for rapid industrialisation was made after the Fifteenth Party Congress in 1927. The Plans aimed to use the most advanced technology, applied with an emphasis on heavy industry, to make the USSR self-sufficient. They would rely on the mass mobilisation of its people and resources. The language of the Plans reflected a massive military campaign as the people were encouraged to 'storm' and 'conquer' on many 'fronts'.

Industrialisation was placed under the direction of Gosplan, the State Planning Authority. Targets were set for those industries the government saw as the priority for modernisation, and resources were allocated accordingly. The Five-Year Plans saw the rapid extension of the state over the economy. People's Commissariats were set up to co-ordinate the differing branches of industry and Party officials were used at factory level to ensure orders from the centre were carried out.

The Five-Year Plans saw a drive against the Nepmen, as small businesses and shopkeepers were often forced to join state co-operatives. As the state took over nearly all of the urban economy, it was clear that the mixed economy of the NEP was at an end. Within the factories there was a concerted campaign against the so-called '**bourgeois experts**', those technical staff who had retained their positions because the state needed their expertise to keep industry running smoothly. This policy, directed by the government, built on the prejudices of the industrial workers and rank and file communists and was probably encouraged by the experts' scepticism that the targets of the Five-Year Plans could ever be achieved. The removal of the bourgeois experts would open up job opportunities to more loyal, if less well-trained, communist members. In 1928, there had been a series of show trials against these bourgeois experts, accused of 'wrecking' and deliberate sabotage, often in collaboration with foreign agents. As class enemies, this group was seen as the enemy within and could not be tolerated. Part of the old world disappeared and was replaced by a stronger socialist order. Unfortunately, the loss of this group of technical experts hindered the progress made under the Five-Year Plans.

KEY TERM

Bourgeois experts
A term used by Bolsheviks to describe former managers and owners of industry who were given jobs after nationalisation because they possessed skills and expertise that were desperately needed.

- **The First Five-Year Plan (1928–32)** concentrated on rapid growth in heavy industry, such as coal, steel and iron, an approach recommended by '**superindustrialisers**'. It used the ideas of Evgeny Preobrazhensky, an economic theorist, although Stalin did not acknowledge this. Consumer industries, such as textiles and producers of household goods, were neglected. The original justification for this focus was the need to build up an industrial infrastructure of factories, communication networks and plant before other sectors could flourish. This was a reasonable justification for the focus of the first Five-Year Plan.
- **The Second Five-Year Plan (1933–37)** initially set higher targets for the production of consumer goods, but as the 1930s progressed, the rise of Hitler in Germany redirected the focus onto the needs of defence, which meant that heavy industry continued to receive priority.
- **The Third Five-Year Plan**, launched in 1938, was geared even more directly towards arms production to meet the threat of Germany.

What were the results of Stalin's Five-Year Plans, 1928–41?

The targets of the First Five-Year Plan of 1928–32 were very ambitious at the start, but as the plan was put into effect they were constantly raised to ever more unrealistic heights. It was, as McCauley (1993) puts it, 'as if mathematics had ceased to function'. The goal became not just fulfilling the plan, but over-fulfilling it; not to do so was a sign of a lack of commitment to the Revolution. Although targets were rarely reached, the achievements of the first three Five-Year Plans were impressive and transformed the Soviet Union into a major industrial power with a modern, if unbalanced, economy.

The First Plan

Industrial expansion under the first Five-Year Plan was largely the result of making more efficient use of existing factories and equipment. New plants were built but they did not make a significant impact on production until after 1934. Large industrial centres, such as Magnitogorsk and Gorki, were built from scratch and became large cities. In 1929, there were only 25 people living at Magnitogorsk; three years later, this number had increased to 250,000. Facilities at these centres were primitive, with workers housed in tents and temporary huts. The material rewards were limited and work was hard. The workers, who often volunteered to move to these sites, had to rely on their revolutionary attitudes and socialist beliefs for motivation. This was particularly necessary given the fact that, even by 1933, only 17 percent of the workforce in Moscow was skilled and, in other cities, the figure was considerably smaller. The government relied on the use of 'shock brigades' made up of the best workers, to set an example. The most well-known model worker was Alexei Stakhanov, a coal miner from the Donbass region who could mine 15 times the average amount of coal. There were rewards for model workers, such as a new flat and bigger rations; slackers were held up to ridicule. Many sites had statues to Lenin built in order to inspire the workers to greater revolutionary achievements.

As a last resort, the government could always use slave labour to complete large building projects. Vast quantities of precious economic resources were located in cold, remote regions, such as Siberia, where nobody would go to work. The answer was to use the burgeoning population in the **Gulag**.

KEY TERM

Superindustrialisers
Those within the Communist Party who believed that agricultural surpluses should be seized by the state in order to invest in industry. They believed that heavy industry should be given priority over other sectors of the economy.

KEY TERM

Gulag
The Chief Administration of Corrective Labour Camps. It became a vast system of forced labour camps whose appalling conditions gave it the nickname 'the meat grinder'. The period of its greatest expansion was from 1929 to 1953 when a total of about 18 million prisoners, out of a population of 180 million, passed through the system.

Labour camp prisoners were diverted to mines, railway construction and other projects. The most notorious was the White Sea Canal project, which employed 180,000 prisoners by 1932. During the winter of 1931–32, 10,000 prisoners died on this project. The completion of the canal was hailed as a propaganda triumph by the government but, in order to reduce costs and speed up construction, the depth was reduced from 22 feet (6.7 m) to 12 feet (3.6 m), rendering the canal useless for all but small barges. This seems to illustrate the attitude of Stalin and his government that the human cost and quality were of no consequence as long as the aim was achieved.

It was not only the workers who were put under severe pressure to achieve targets. Factory managers, faced with increasingly unrealistic targets, used a wide range of enterprising methods, which occasionally included ambushing resources destined for other factories. Bribery was another useful tool of the factory manager. The corruption for which the USSR became infamous had its roots in the policy requirements of the 1930s.

In the rush to fulfil targets, quality was often sacrificed. The Stalingrad tractor factory was supposed to be producing 500 tractors a month in 1930, but in June it only managed eight. Most of these broke down within three days.

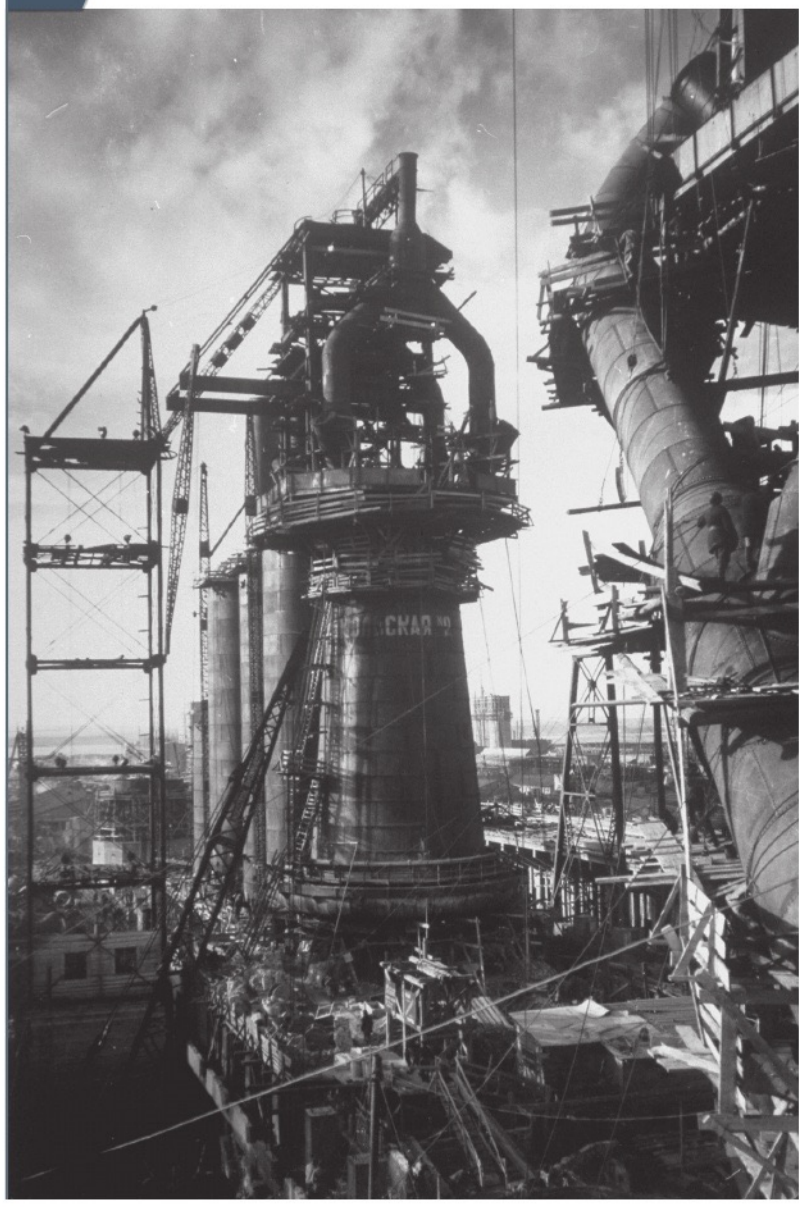
The Second and Third Five-Year Plans

The Second Five-Year Plan drew on lessons learnt from the chaotic planning of the first plan and made more use of technical expertise. With the new industrial centres starting production, the results were impressive: in particular, coal production rose substantially during the Second Plan (see Source 6). The chemical industry also made progress, but the oil industry remained disappointing. The Third Plan became heavily focused on the defence industry in light of growing international tension.

The Plans developed both traditional industrial centres, such as Moscow and Leningrad, and new centres in the less-developed parts of the country. Under the Second and Third Five-Year Plans much of the new industry was located in the remoter areas of the USSR such as Kazakhstan. This acted as a form of regional development to promote a more even distribution of industrialisation throughout the USSR. In addition, there was a deliberate policy of locating east of the Ural Mountains, where industry would be safer should there be an attack from the West.

Despite problems with the official figures produced by the Soviet government, there is no doubt that the economic achievements of the Five-Year Plans of the 1930s were substantial. Historian A. Nove has drawn attention to some of the issues concerning official production figures, which indicate that production of machinery greatly overfulfilled the Plans, despite less success in the production of metal. This appears odd given the obvious connections between the two industries. Nonetheless, there seems to have been rapid growth in the engineering industry and transportation. Although few industries met the overambitious targets of the First Five-Year Plan there was an enormous growth in industrial production, especially in heavy industry. Overall, the period 1928–41 saw a 17 percent growth rate, but progress was unbalanced. There was a four-fold increase in the production of steel and a six-fold increase in coal production (see Source 6). The Plans saw the successful completion of projects to provide power for the growth in industry. The Dnieper dam project was one of the most important examples. Nonetheless, consumer industries suffered. The production of textiles actually declined during the First Five-Year Plan and the housing industry was virtually ignored. The shortage of consumer goods was made worse by the fact that the collectivisation of agriculture had destroyed a lot of cottage industry previously undertaken in rural areas. The focus on heavy industry had consequences that the Soviet Union had to live with for the rest of its history.

SOURCE 5 Magnitogorsk: one of the new industrial centres created by the Five-Year Plans.



SOURCE 6 Official Soviet coal production figures 1927–37 (taken from A. Nove, *An Economic History of the USSR 1917–1991*, published in 1992).

	1927 Actual	1932 Actual	1932 Goal	1937 Actual	1937 Goal
Electricity (100m kwh)	5.0	13.4	22.0	36.2	38.0
Coal (million tons)	35.4	64.3	75.0	128.0	152.5
Oil (million tons)	11.7	21.4	22.0	28.5	46.8
Steel (million tons)	4.0	5.9	10.4	17.7	17.0
Pig iron (million tons)	3.3	6.2	10.0	14.5	16.0
Wool cloth (million metres)	97.0	93.3	270.0	108.3	226.6

Despite this, there was some advance in consumer goods under the Second Five-Year Plan. Footwear production and food processing made significant increases. By the late 1930s, these developments were starting to have some impact on living standards. New bakeries, ice-cream and meat-packing factories were established in many towns. However, these improvements, although welcome, did not solve the problem of shortages in important consumer goods.

Chaotic implementation and planning have often been highlighted as factors that limited the achievements of Stalin's economic policy. The state's rigid adoption of a command economy, directed by the government, led to failures because planners based in Moscow had little understanding of local conditions in the far-flung parts of the Soviet Union. The result was that many resources were wasted because they were inappropriate. By removing many managers and technical experts through the purges in 1937, the actions of the Party led to a slowdown of the economy.

Conclusion

Between 1941 and 1945, the Soviet Union showed that it was able to defend itself against an attack by Nazi Germany and defeat the invading forces. On the face of it, this seemed to prove that Stalin's aim of transforming the USSR into a modern industrial society, able to withstand attack by foreign capitalist powers, had been achieved. The Soviet Union had undoubtedly made enormous economic progress, but beneath the surface this progress was unbalanced, with a marked decline in certain sectors while others showed impressive growth. Economic progress was often achieved amidst, and in spite of, chaos in the planning and application of policy. The extensive use of slave labour from the Gulag meant that it was also achieved at an enormous human cost. Around 10,000 labourers died constructing the White Sea Canal, just one of Stalin's prestige projects.

The process of industrialisation had dislocated large sectors of the population and led to severe deprivations. The health of the workers and the natural environment were severely damaged, but the promise of a better life in the future kept many of the workers going. However, the reality of a better future was delayed.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

The Five-Year Plans 1928–41

1 Make a list of the main successes of the Five-Year Plans 1928–41.

2 Make a list of their main weaknesses and failures.

3 Consider the view that 'the Soviet economy was transformed between 1928 and 1941'.

Agricultural collectivisation and its impact

Stalin recognised that industrialisation could only be carried out if it was supported by food surpluses. For this to be possible, Soviet agriculture would need to be far more efficient and productive.
To this end, enormous changes to agriculture accompanied Stalin's Five-Year Plans. Stalin's policy of collectivisation in agriculture would have fundamental consequences for the rural population of the Soviet Union. The organisation of food production would sweep away the old system of small peasant farms and labourers based on the *mir*. In its place, state ownership would be imposed on agricultural production that enabled mechanisation to take place on much larger units.

SOURCE 7 Peasants working on a new collective during the early 1930s. Note the evidence of Party control.



Reasons for collectivisation

The NEP, introduced by Lenin in 1921, had left agriculture largely unchanged since the Revolution of 1917. It had been a compromise with the peasantry over the issue of government control of food supplies and, as a result, by 1928 agriculture in the Soviet Union was still run largely on an individual basis by peasant households under the supervision of the *mir*, a body made up of village elders. By 1928, both economic and political forces were pushing Stalin towards abandoning the NEP and forcing the peasants into the collectivisation of farming.

- **The link with industry**
  A fear of invasion by foreign powers had convinced many in the Communist Party that there was an urgent need to industrialise. A modern economic base was seen as essential if the Soviet Union was to defend itself against an attack by the capitalist powers. However, industrial development would only be possible if it was supported by an increase in agricultural productivity. Industrialisation would lead to an increase in the population of towns and cities, a population that would need to be fed by an increase in food surpluses. The new industries also required some technology from abroad and the Soviet Union needed food surpluses to export in order to obtain foreign exchange to pay for this. Therefore, agriculture would have to provide more than just food to support industry. Labour would be needed in the new industrial centres and this could only be achieved in the short term by the mechanisation of agriculture. This would enable labourers to be released from the countryside to work in industry. Thus, the policy of industrialisation could only be achieved if agriculture was made more efficient.

- **The economic case for collectivisation**
  Agriculture, centred on small peasant plots, was very inefficient compared with the rest of Europe. Most farms were owned by peasant households, with their land distributed in a piecemeal fashion. The formation of collective farms where peasants would be grouped together on larger farm units would create economies of scale. Hedgerows and boundaries could be ripped out and the resulting larger units would make the use of machinery more viable and cost-effective. The use of machinery would enable food production to be increased and would also reduce the labour requirements of agricultural production. This would release many much-needed workers for the growing industrial plants.

- **The political case for collectivisation**
  As well as improving the efficiency of agriculture, collectivisation would help extend socialism to the countryside and therefore ensure the survival of the Revolution. The control of the Party in the countryside was weak and its support had declined since the Tambov Rising of 1921. The peasants also had little enthusiasm for socialist principles. The Bolsheviks had introduced the Land Decree in 1917 to take large landed estates from the aristocracy, but they had never intended that land should be the personal property of individual peasants. The NEP had put aside attempts to collectivise the peasants and, by 1925, less than one percent of farmland was collectivised. In this situation, the principle of private ownership was maintained in the minds of the peasants and some used the compromises introduced under the NEP to make a profit. Collectivisation provided the opportunity for getting rid of the kulaks, those richer peasants who seemed to benefit from the NEP. In the eyes of the Communists, the kulaks hoarded food for their own consumption rather than providing it for industrial workers in the towns. This led to pressure on the government leadership to rid the country of this capitalist class. To fail to do so would hold back progress towards socialism.

By 1928, arguments in the Party over agricultural production came to a head. Stalin had become convinced that the state of agriculture and the attitudes of sections of the peasantry were holding back industrial progress. State procurements (that is, the amount of surplus grain given to the government by the peasants) had been falling since 1926. The peasants had become wary of growing too much food, knowing it would be seized by the state at a low price. This acted as a disincentive to raise production, as did the lack of industrial goods available to buy with any profit made from the surplus. Stalin saw the solution as a forced policy of collectivisation to increase food production.

The process of collectivisation

The process of collectivisation consisted of a series of phases, each becoming more radical. In December 1927, the Fifteenth Party Congress decided on a programme of voluntary collectivisation, but food shortages in 1928 led the government to carry out forced requisitioning of grain as a temporary emergency measure. This form of action was termed the 'Ural-Siberian' method and it was used increasingly as the pace of collectivisation accelerated. Stalin now talked of moving from a policy of limiting the exploitative tendencies of the kulaks to one of 'liquidating' the kulaks as a class. The term 'kulak' had originally been applied to those richer peasants who owned their own plot of land which was often very small. Local Party officials went into villages to announce the organisation of a collective farm (*kolkhoz*) and to lecture the peasants on the advantages of forming a collective, until enough of them had signed up as members. Promises of increased mechanisation through the establishment of Machine and Tractor Stations (MTS) were given. The MTS were government-run centres that supplied farm machinery, such as tractors, to the collectives. They also provided advice on farming techniques and political lectures to persuade the peasants of the benefits of socialism and collectivisation. Once enough peasants had signed up, the collective could seize animals, grain supplies and buildings in the village as the property of the collective.

The term 'kulak' started to be applied not just to the richer peasants but to any peasant who refused to join. Labelled as 'class enemies', they were to be deported to Siberia and the Urals.

The implementation of collectivisation was to lead to violent opposition from a large number of peasants, particularly in the richer agricultural areas of Ukraine and the Caucasus region. Rather than hand over their property to the state, many kulaks set fire to their farms and slaughtered their animals. Party officials were sometimes murdered on arrival in the villages. The regime dealt with this opposition by sending in '**dekulakisation squads**'. Party members, the so-called 'Twenty-five Thousanders', were sent from the cities to help forcibly organise collectives. They knew little about agriculture but were well-versed in class warfare. The OGPU, the secret police, were also used to rounding up kulaks and other peasants who refused to co-operate and deport them to remote regions of the USSR, often to labour camps. On some occasions, the Red Army was used to quell unrest; some troublesome villages were bombed out of existence by the air force. The peasants' opposition resulted in a temporary backing down by Stalin, who in March 1930 issued his article 'Dizzy with Success', blaming overzealous local Party officials for 'excesses'. Yet this slowdown in the process of collectivisation only lasted long enough to ensure that the peasants sowed the new year's crop. Some concessions were offered to the peasantry, with members of the collectives allowed to have some animals and a small garden plot for their own use, but the programme of collectivisation continued to be pursued. By 1932, 62 percent of peasant households had been collectivised, rising to 93 percent in 1937.

KEY TERM

Dekulakisation squads
Groups of loyal Party members, often referred to as the 'Twenty-five Thousanders', who were sent into the countryside to force the peasants into collectives. In this way the kulaks would be eliminated. In practice, 'dekulakisation' covered a range of methods for eliminating the kulaks, including murder.

The results of collectivisation

In economic terms, the results of collectivisation were devastating. The supply of machinery to the collectives was slow and many were without tractors until the mid-1930s. The removal of the kulaks was damaging as they were often the most productive farmers. It was the kulaks who many relied upon for the hire of tools. The actions of those peasants who resisted collectivisation also damaged agricultural production. The slaughtering of animals by the kulaks had a serious effect on the numbers of livestock. Between 1928 and 1933, the number of cattle halved and this loss was not fully recovered until 1953. The consequence of this collapse was a shortage of meat and milk. Grain production also fell, declining from 73.3 million tonnes in 1928 to 67.6 million in 1934 (see Source 8).

The fall in food production need not have been disastrous, but its impact on the countryside was pronounced because of the rise in grain seized by the government under the system of state procurements. The aim of producing enough food to feed the towns and the Red Army was achieved, but only by taking much-needed supplies from the countryside.

As the rural population starved, the government seized food for export to gain foreign exchange. Widespread famine occurred in 1932–33, particularly affecting the Ukraine, Kazakhstan and the Caucasus region. Peasants started to move into the towns in search of food, until the government introduced a passport system to prevent peasants leaving the collectives. They became effectively tied to the collective in a system that began to partly resemble serfdom, from which the peasants had supposedly been liberated in 1861. Unable to move from the collective, some peasants resorted to eating their own children in order to survive. The government officially denied any existence of famine, dismissing rumours as a few 'local difficulties'. This claim was supported by foreign visitors to the USSR, such as the British socialists Sidney and Beatrice Webb, but they had been escorted to model collectives well away from the famine areas. Recent research carried out on newly available Soviet data puts the number of famine-related deaths at four million in 1933 alone.

SOURCE 8 Agricultural production during collectivisation (compiled by A. Nove in 1992 from Soviet sources).

	1930	1931	1932	1933
Cattle (millions)	52.5	47.9	40.7	38.4
Pigs (millions)	13.6	14.4	11.6	12.1
Sheep and goats (millions)	108.8	77.7	52.1	50.2
Grain harvest (million tons)	83.5	69.5	69.6	68.4
State procurements (million tons)	22.1	22.8	18.5	22.6

SOURCE 9 Victims of the famine during the 1930s.



A slow recovery in agriculture began after a relatively good harvest in 1933, but grain production rose very sluggishly. Good weather helped the 1937 harvest, and the fall in demand for animal fodder meant more grain could be used for human consumption. The decline in livestock that had accompanied collectivisation resulted in a lack of haulage power. The slow pace at which newly produced tractors got to collectives made this situation worse. In the absence of horses and tractors, humans resorted to pulling ploughs themselves. Recovery was hampered by continual government interference and hare-brained schemes, one of which involved growing crops of a plant that allegedly produced rubber.

Inadequate planning resulted in Party officials in Moscow giving orders to collectives, which took little account of conditions on the ground. Poor planning meant that the push to collectivise was not co-ordinated with the manufacture of tractors or other agricultural machinery, leaving the collectives without the tools to prosper.

The total cost, in terms of human lives, is difficult to quantify exactly but represents a human tragedy of epic proportions. Stalin had achieved his aim of 'liquidating' the kulaks as a class. This class had been estimated to be about 15 million in 1928. Historians' estimates of the number of deaths range from five to ten million. In 1986, historian Robert Conquest argued that collectivisation, with its resulting famine, was Stalin's deliberate policy of genocide against the Ukrainian people, sometimes referred to as the **holodomor**. An analysis of the grain harvest in 1932 indicates that it was Ukraine, the chief grain-growing region of the country, that bore the brunt of the food shortage. Ukrainian nationalism had been a worry to the Soviet government in the civil war of the 1920s. The case of the Kazakhs illustrates another human cost. This nomadic group were forced into collectives against their will. The change in their way of life had devastating consequences. Their sheep flocks were virtually wiped out, and a typhus epidemic reduced the Kazakh population by 40 percent. It was hardly surprising that some peasants cheered the invading German forces in 1941.

KEY TERM

Holodomor
Literally meaning murder by starvation. It is applied to Stalin's actions against Ukraine during the process of enforced collectivisation.

Given the devastating impact on economic performance and the immensely damaging social impact of collectivisation, the question of whether Stalin's prime aim was political can be raised. Where collectivisation did succeed was in imposing Party control over a reluctant rural population. In 1930 the *mir* was abolished and replaced by the *kolkhoz* administration, headed by a chairman who was a Party member and usually from the town. Party control was extended by the use of teenagers, members of the Communist youth organisation, who used wooden watchtowers to spy on the peasants in the fields to ensure they did not steal food to feed their own families. Control had been secured, but it deepened the divide between town and countryside. Agriculture and rural communities had been sacrificed for the needs of industry and the towns.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

Collectivisation

1 Give three reasons for collectivisation.

2 List the effects of collectivisation. Which category would each of these effects come under: economic, social or political?

SOURCE 10 Tractors leaving the factory after production, 1929.



SOURCE 11 From N. Khrushchev, *Khrushchev Remembers*, published in 1971. Khrushchev was a member of the Politburo under Stalin.

During a trip from Kiev to Moscow in 1939, my chauffeur told me that the tyres which were being issued for our cars were wearing out much too quickly. In fact, they were blowing out at the sides while they were still almost brand new. When I got to Moscow, I told Stalin that this manufacturing defect was costing a lot of time and money: Stalin never liked to hear anyone criticise something that was Soviet-made. He listened to my complaint with obvious displeasure. Then he angrily instructed me to liquidate this situation and to find the culprits...

When I reported to Stalin, I stressed that we were producing poor-quality tyres because, in our desire to economise, we had violated the production procedure recommended by the firm from which the equipment was purchased... The tyre workers may have surpassed their quota, but they have overdone it. Our workers should have paid more attention to quality when applying the tyre cording. All the shock-workers on the honour board at the factory were, in actual fact, ruining what they produced.

EXTRACT 1 An assessment by the historian A. Nove, from *An Economic History of the USSR 1917–1991*, published in 1992.

Whatever the validity of certain official claims, it remains true beyond question that the second Five-year Plan period was one of impressive achievement, as is clear from the commodity statistics...

Both in volume and in degree of sophistication the advances recorded in these years did help to transform the whole balance of industry and to diminish very substantially the USSR's dependence on foreign countries for its capital goods.

THINKING HISTORICALLY Evidence (3b)

It depends on the question

When considering the usefulness of a piece of evidence, people often think about authenticity in the case of artefacts, reliability in the case of witness statements, or methodology and structure in the case of secondary accounts. A better historical approach to the usefulness of a piece of evidence would be to think about the statements that we can make about the past based on it. Different statements can be made with different degrees of certainty, depending on the evidence.

Work in small groups and answer the following.

1 Look at Source 10.

a) Write three statements that you can reasonably make about the First Five-Year Plan based solely on Source 10.

b) Which of the statements can be made with the greatest degree of certainty? Why is this? Which statement can be made with the smallest degree of certainty?

c) What else might you need to increase your confidence in your statements?

2 Source 10 shows an artefact (the tractor) and Source 11 is a witness statement. Which is more useful to the historian studying Soviet tractor production in the 1930s under the Five-Year Plans?

3 Look at Extract 1.

How would the historian have gone about constructing this piece? What kinds of evidence would they have needed?

Recovery from war after 1945

The impact of the Second World War on the Soviet economy

The German invasion of the USSR, which began on 22 June 1941, put an enormous strain on the resources of the country. The centralisation of the economy, which was an integral feature of the Stalinist system, proved to be effective in mobilising the resources of the Soviet Union for war. It was a mammoth task. At the local level, Defence Committees were set up to co-ordinate war production. Factories were quickly converted to the production of war materials. In Moscow, a children's bicycle factory was converted for the manufacture of flame-throwers. Whole factories were evacuated to safer areas of the USSR in the east, away from the invading Germans.

Despite the initial collapse in industrial output, which occurred in the immediate aftermath of the invasion, Soviet industrial production rose impressively, if unevenly, after 1941. Between 1943 and 1945, over 73,000 tanks and 94,000 aircraft were produced. The economy did find some products beyond its capability; tinned meat, including Spam, was imported from Britain under the Lend-Lease scheme, whereby supplies were provided with payment deferred. As the economy produced large amounts of military hardware, the production of consumer goods was virtually non-existent. By the end of the war, the damage in Nazi-occupied areas had reduced overall production: steel production had fallen to 12 million tonnes in 1945 compared with 18 million tonnes produced in 1940; oil production was less than two-thirds and wool production less than half of that produced in 1940.

In agriculture, the situation was also desperate. With the most able-bodied men from the collectives conscripted into the armed forces, and farm machinery and draft animals requisitioned by the Red Army, the impact of the war on food production was devastating. Grain output fell from 95 million tonnes in 1940 to 30 million tonnes in 1942, and the number of cattle halved. In these circumstances, the government lifted restrictions on the cultivation of private plots to provide an incentive for peasants to keep up production.

By the end of the war, much of the western part of the USSR was devastated; 25 million people were homeless and over 1,700 towns and 70,000 villages were classified as 'destroyed'. Reconstruction would be an enormous undertaking.

The Fourth Five-Year Plan (1946–50): economic reconstruction

The priority of the government was to bring about economic reconversion and reconstruction as quickly as possible. Many factories that had been converted to the production of wartime goods needed to be converted back to civilian production. Large industrial plants needed to be rebuilt. In order to achieve these aims, rigid state control was reinforced over the war-shattered economy. This process was made more difficult because of the ending of Lend-Lease.

One advantage that the USSR could now exploit was its control over Eastern Europe. Much of the region had fallen into the hands of the Red Army after the defeat of Nazi Germany. Large amounts of machinery were taken from East Germany as reparations, although once transported to the USSR it was often left to rust as workers were unable to reassemble them. Trade agreements were signed with the new Soviet-dominated governments of Eastern Europe, which were so one-sided to the advantage of the USSR that they amounted to little more than economic exploitation. In general, however, economic reconstruction was to be based largely on the efforts of the Soviet people using Soviet resources.

The Fourth Five-Year Plan (1946–50) aimed, through a programme of reconstruction, to restore the economy to pre-war levels, a massive undertaking in so short a time. The results were impressive. Industrial production recovered quickly, helped largely by the use of over two million slave labourers from the Gulag. Strong central planning by the government was an important factor in achieving such quick results. The government was able to redirect wartime labour for the purposes of reconstruction. Retraining programmes were effective at ensuring workers had the basic skills needed for the jobs now in demand. Penalties for slackers remained harsh. The focus was placed on heavy industry (as before the war), with the production of armaments receiving special attention. The metal industry and heavy engineering were especially successful. The Plan was overfulfilled, but problems persisted and consumer industries remained neglected. Moreover, the economy had returned to the priorities of the 1930s, a feature reinforced by a failure to adopt new technology, such as developments in plastics and chemicals.

The Fifth Five-Year Plan (1951–55)

The Fifth Five-Year Plan set out to achieve continued growth, albeit at a slower and perhaps more realistic rate. The emergence of **the Cold War** resulted in an increase in arms expenditure as the military budget increased year on year. Growth in other industries was less impressive. Large amounts of resources were diverted into the building of grandiose projects which had limited economic value. The Volga-Don Canal was a huge undertaking that resulted in a canal that carried very little traffic but was adorned with many statues of Stalin. The construction of large government buildings in Moscow made use of resources that could have been used to deal with the severe shortage of housing.

Overall, the performance of Soviet industry in the immediate post-war period was impressive and, from 1948, living standards in the towns started to recover. Price reductions eased conditions, and from 1952 real wages for urban workers reached the level of 1928. Conditions in the countryside recovered much more slowly.

KEY TERM

The Cold War
The term given to the deterioration in relations between the USSR and the West, led by the USA and Britain. Their war-time alliance broke down during the period 1945 to 1949. The Cold War continued until 1991.

EXTEND YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Stalin's prestige projects
A key part of the Five-Year Plans was the construction of large projects that were useful as propaganda for the regime. Examples included the following.

The **Dnieper Dam** project began construction in 1927 and started producing electricity in 1932. At the time of its completion it was the biggest dam in Europe. The dam provided power for steel and aluminium industries in the surrounding region. This project was publicised through propaganda posters. Despite requiring large amounts of valuable resources for its construction, the project was of considerable economic benefit. The same could not always be said for Stalin's other pet projects.

The **White Sea Canal** was constructed between 1931 and 1933. It linked Leningrad to the White Sea and was 141 miles long. Its construction was carried out using an estimated 180,000 slave labourers from the Gulag. About 10,000 of these labourers died in the process of its construction. Despite the huge human loss, Stalin praised the project as a huge success, completed under budget and in less than two years. In the rush to cut costs, the canal was not dug deep enough to prevent it icing over during the winter months.

The **Volga-Don Canal** was a key project of the Fifth Five-Year Plan. Constructed largely by slave labour, its workers were told that 1 day working on the project would reduce their prison sentence by three days, thus encouraging them to work hard on the scheme. The canal illustrates the growing obsession of Stalin with gigantism at the expense of practical use. The canal carried little traffic because it was located where there was little demand for water transport. It was decorated with statues of Stalin, a reflection of the cult of personality that reached absurd heights after the Second World War. Investment in rail transport would have had a much greater economic benefit.

Agriculture

During the war, the government had given some concessions to the peasants in order to sustain food production. A 'Link' system was promoted whereby small groups of peasants were given responsibility for areas within the collective farm. As long as targets for food deliveries to the state were met, the peasants could sell the remainder for profit. With the war over, the Party leadership moved quickly to reimpose control and the Link system was abolished. Taxes were raised on private plots in a bid to reduce their importance. Supervision of agricultural resources was concentrated into the hands of the Party through the Machine and Tractor Stations.

Agricultural production remained low after the war and labour problems continued. In the countryside, the imbalance between the sexes was more pronounced as able-bodied men tended to move to the towns for work, adding to the shortage of males caused by losses in the war. Even as late as 1950, it was possible to find villages entirely populated by women and children. The shortage of livestock added to the problem and women often had little choice but to shackle themselves to ploughs in order to till the soil. A drought in 1946 made the situation worse and, in 1947, there was a famine in parts of Ukraine. Recovery remained slow and even in 1952 grain production was below the figure for 1940; productivity was lower than it had been in 1913.

In an attempt to improve productivity, Khrushchev, whom Stalin had appointed Party Secretary for the Moscow province in 1949, promoted the idea of creating larger collectives, which would make it easier to use large-scale machinery. It would also make collectives easier to control. By 1952, over 100,000 larger collectives had been created, although they remained unpopular with the peasants. Stalin's grandiose ideas also had an influence on agriculture. His plan of utilising large areas of semi-desert regions by planting them with trees came to nothing when the trees died.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

Economic recovery after 1945

1 In what ways did economic policy change during the years 1945–53?

2 In what ways did economic policy after1945 show continuity with that of the 1930s?

3 How successful was the economic recovery of the Soviet Union after the Second World War?

AS Level Exam-Style Question Section B

How far would you agree that the Five-Year Plans had transformed the Soviet economy by 1953? (20 marks)

Tip

Think about how the Five-Year Plans had changed the economy (rather than just state what they did). 'How far' requires you to weigh up the degree of change compared with the situation under the NEP, to judge whether it was enough to say it 'transformed' the Soviet economy.

A Level Exam-Style Question Section B

How successful were economic policies in promoting economic development in the USSR in the years 1917–41? (20 marks)

Tip

This question requires careful explanation of how economic policies under Lenin and Stalin promoted economic development. You will need to present an overall argument that defines the criteria for success and weighs up the degree to which they were met. Think about the context within which Soviet economic policies operated, for example the civil war, the need to meet the threat of foreign invasion.

HOW FAR DID ECONOMIC POLICY CHANGE BETWEEN 1953 AND 1985?

Stalin's death in 1953 provided an opportunity to change both the pace and focus of economic policy. Khrushchev's programme of de-Stalinisation saw a move towards a greater focus on consumer goods and agriculture and at a more realistic pace. The Sixth Five-Year Plan (1956–60) saw the development of the Virgin Lands Scheme in agriculture. This was followed by the Seven-Year Plans (1959–65), which focused on the promotion of light industry, a trend continued by the plans that followed. This pattern was continued, if not accelerated, by his successors in the years up to 1985. With the reduction in terror to subdue the population, other means of providing social stability were needed. The government saw improving living standards through greater access to consumer goods as the key to achieving this. Attempts were made to reform the system of 'the Plan', but real and lasting change proved elusive.

The promotion of light industry, chemicals and consumer goods

Khrushchev wanted to move the focus of economic policy away from heavy industry, the so-called 'metal eaters', towards **light industry**, chemicals and consumer goods. This would broaden the base of the Soviet economy and start to bring real benefits to the lives of the Soviet population. The long-promised 'workers' paradise' would start to become a reality.

Khrushchev's economic policy faced several key challenges that were products of the rigid command economy that had developed under Stalin:

- A vast bureaucratic system of administrators based in Moscow stifled initiative. It was difficult for local innovations to take place for fear of upsetting the Plan. The atmosphere of terror under Stalin had done little to encourage initiative. The workforce was subject to harsh labour laws, including fines for absenteeism.

KEY TERM

Light industry
The term used for industries that are involved in manufacturing goods, often household products such as clothes, shoes and furniture. They have a more direct impact on the standard of living than heavy industries, such as coal, steel and oil, which had seen the greatest growth under Stalin's Five-Year Plans.

- The system was clumsy and wasteful. It was particularly difficult to deal with new trends and unforeseen events. Administrators worked out the likely demand for goods and then set targets to ensure demand was met. If demand increased, say for heavy coats because of a particularly hard winter, the system was too inflexible to respond.

To deal with these issues Khrushchev pushed ahead with a series of reforms:

- In 1957, Khrushchev set up 105 Regional Economic Councils (*Sovnarkhozy*) to supervise enterprises. It was an attempt to move some decision-making from the centre to regional bases, which, it was hoped, would be able to take more account of local circumstances.
- The harsh labour laws of the Stalin years were removed and the working week reduced from 48 hours to 41 by 1960. Incentives replaced Stalin's policy of coercion.
- Managers of industrial enterprises were given more influence in their factories. Khrushchev disliked the fact that they were merely 'robots of Moscow'. To encourage initiative they were allowed to keep 40 percent of the profits made by their factory to invest as they wished in their enterprise.
- There was a greater emphasis on vocational education to support industrial developments. Specialist technical schools were set up and vocational education expanded.

Many of these reforms were promoted by Evsei Liberman. **The Liberman Plan, 1962** called for greater autonomy for local managers and for the market to replace the state as the decider of prices. His ideas were watered down by conservatives in the Politburo who preferred to stick to Stalinist principles.

EXTEND YOUR KNOWLEDGE

The Liberman Plan, 1962

This plan was drawn up by Evsei Liberman, a Soviet economist, to address the issues of underperformance in the Soviet economy. He taught at the Kharkiv Engineering and Economic Institute and wrote many books on economic policy. One of his key works was *Analysis of the Use of Resources* (1963). Liberman believed that it was vital to encourage greater initiative in the command economy in order to improve productivity. To achieve this, he recommended greater decentralisation of decision-making and greater use of the economics of supply and demand to set prices. His ideas were resisted by conservatives within the Politburo and Party officials who feared a loss of influence in economic planning. Nonetheless, his ideas were influential in reformist circles in the USSR, and they formed the basis of Kosygin's reforms of 1965 and further reforms under Brezhnev. The conservatives were always strong enough to ensure Liberman's ideas only had a limited impact and they were constantly watered down when applied. Liberman died in 1981.

The Seven-Year Plan (1959–65)

The influence of Khrushchev on economic policy was evident in the Seven-Year Plan.

The discovery of new mineral resources, especially in the Volga-Urals fields, encouraged the government to push ahead with transforming the fuel and chemical industries. This would involve a shift of emphasis from coal to oil and gas. Natural gas was cheap and available in abundant quantities, but it was little used.

The focus on the chemical industry was linked to the increased targets for consumer goods. The production of synthetic fibres was to increase from 166,000 tons in 1958 to a target of 666,000 tons by 1965. Substantial increases were also targeted in footwear, natural fabrics and housing.

In addition, regional development was to be promoted, with areas east of the Urals receiving over 40 percent of the available investment.

SOURCE 12 Figures for the Seven-Year Plan (compiled by A. Nove from Soviet sources).

	1958	1965 target	1965 actual
National income (output index)	100	162–165	158
Output of consumer goods	100	180	184
Coal (million tons)	493	600–612	578
Oil (million tons)	113	230–240	242.9
Gas (milliard kWhs)	235	500–520	507
Synthetic fibres (thousand tons)	166	666	407
Footwear (million pairs)	356.4	515	486
Housing (million square metres)	71.2	650–660	79.2

Results

In 1959, Khrushchev had boasted to the West, 'We will bury you.' This claim to be able to overtake the West in technology and consumer goods was far-fetched, but the launching of Sputnik, the first space satellite, in 1957 worried many Western commentators. These worries were increased when the USSR sent the first dog into space and, in 1961, made Yuri Gagarin the first man in space. These achievements were a great source of Soviet pride and this optimism was encouraged by many of the results of the Seven-Year Plan, which were impressive even if goals were not met (see Source 12). Consumer goods were more abundant and this raised living standards for many.

These headline successes masked the reality of Soviet economic performance. Although there was more choice for consumers, the quality of the goods was often poor. Incidents of targets met, despite producing useless products, were common: for example, the shoe factory that produced its target of shoes, but all had the heel nailed to the toe.

The annual growth rate of the Soviet economy in the 1950s was 7.1 percent. This seemed impressive compared with the US growth rate of 2.9 percent, but the Soviet economy still lagged behind because its economic base was smaller. Problems remained, with poor labour productivity, inefficiency and waste. The *Sovnarkhozy* experiment made national planning more difficult because the requirements of local enterprises were harder to foresee. At the centre of the planning organisation, Gosplan became overwhelmed with work, yet with less influence to direct decisions. The division of the Party apparatus into industrial and agricultural branches in 1962 merely added to the confusion.

By 1964, economic growth had slowed. Spending on consumer goods was reduced and the housing programme was cut back. Khrushchev's reforms had come up against stiff resistance from Party bureaucrats who had become strongly attached to Stalin's approach of focusing on heavy industry. The influence of the **military-industrial complex** proved too strong for Khrushchev and his reforms were watered down or simply ignored.

KEY TERM

Military-industrial complex
The term given to the powerful bloc created by links between the armed forces and those sectors of the economy involved in the manufacture of military products.

Investment in agriculture and the Virgin Lands Scheme

Khrushchev was from a peasant background and recognised that the slow growth in food production was holding up further growth in industry, and also keeping living standards unacceptably low. He made genuine attempts to meet peasants on collectives and listen to their views. Khrushchev considered himself to be an agricultural expert and, although he overstated his own abilities in this area, he was genuinely committed to raising the priority of agriculture in the Soviet economy. This would address the situation under Stalin whereby agriculture had been sacrificed for the needs of industry.

To increase productivity, Khrushchev introduced measures to win the peasants over to collectivisation and stimulate initiative in the system:

- In 1955, individual collectives were given greater powers to make decisions at local level. Flexibility over how directions from the Ministry of Agriculture were implemented was allowed.
- The MTS were abolished. The peasants hated them as instruments of central and political interference. Unfortunately, they were replaced with a system that expected each collective to buy its own machinery. This turned out to be a rather naive view.
- Collectives were increased in size, many becoming large agro-industrial villages (*Agrogoroda*) that linked food production with food processing. These units made some sense in terms of creating greater economies of scale. They also enabled much greater investment in agriculture to take place. There was a rapid increase in mechanisation, fertilisers and irrigation. Nonetheless, these much larger farming units proved deeply unpopular with the peasants, who felt more divorced from the land they worked.
- Prices given for state procurements were increased and the system of compulsory seizure of food was replaced by planned state purchases. This was designed to encourage greater productivity.
- Greater concessions were given to peasants as to how they could use their produce from private plots. They were now allowed to sell such produce at private markets. This concession to individualism encouraged peasants to grow more food and it played an important role in ensuring more regular food supplies for the population. Productivity was often much higher on private plots than on collective fields. Nearly all eggs produced came from private plots.
- The most famous of Khrushchev's agricultural initiatives was the Virgin Lands Scheme. Introduced in 1954, it encouraged the opening up of new areas to agricultural production. Volunteers, often members of the young communist league (*Komsomol*), were put to work in areas such as Siberia and Kazakhstan. Six million acres of land were brought under cultivation with considerable investment. Over 120,000 tractors were provided for the scheme.

SOURCE 13 The Virgin Lands Scheme in action, from the mid-1950s. Note the scale of the operation.



ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

Changes in agriculture
Compare Source 13 with Source 7. What do these photographs reveal about changes in agricultural production between the 1930s and the 1960s?

The impact on agricultural production

Khrushchev succeeded in raising the status of agriculture in the Soviet economy: it was now back in the centre of economic planning. This was no mean achievement in the context of a powerful military-industrial complex that argued strongly within the Politburo for its sector to receive preferential treatment. The incomes of farmers doubled between 1952 and 1958 but still remained far below those of industrial workers. Between 1953 and 1958, food production increased by 51 percent.

This seems impressive, but productivity remained low, with too many people engaged in farming. Not all of Khrushchev's policies worked and some began to be viewed as hare-brained schemes. In 1959, the target for grain production in Kazakhstan failed to be met. It was the first sign that the Virgin Lands Scheme was failing. The land was dry and suitable only for grazing. Successful cash crops, such as cotton, were replaced by food crops in a 'maize mania', but without irrigation the plants died.

Investment had been increased, but it was not enough to remedy the problems caused by years of underinvestment. Poor roads and inadequate storage facilities did not help many areas cope with the poor harvest of 1963. The shortage from crop harvests had an impact on supplies of animal fodder. Millions of livestock were slaughtered as a consequence. As the ultimate sign of failure, the USSR had to import grain from North America and Australia. Khrushchev had built his reputation on agricultural success; its failure was a significant contributory factor to his dismissal in 1964.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

Khrushchev's economic policies

1 List the differences between Khrushchev's economic policy and that of Stalin.

2 How successful were Khrushchev's economic reforms?

The limited attempts at reform after 1964

Khrushchev's dismissal as General Secretary resulted in the abandonment of his most contentious policies, but otherwise economic policy remained much the same. The Politburo were too aware of the problems present in the Soviet economy to ignore them, and reformers pushed for further attempts to stimulate creativity and innovation as well as improve Soviet productivity. Unfortunately, their efforts were resisted by conservatives within the government who preferred to stick to the methods of the command economy established by Stalin.

In 1965 the new leadership abolished the Regional Economic Councils set up by Khrushchev and placed more power back into the centre of the planning apparatus. Gosplan was given greater powers of co-ordination. This system echoed that used by Stalin and showed that influence lay with conservatives like Brezhnev. Despite this, there still remained some reformers in the Politburo.

The 'Kosygin Reforms'

In 1965, Alexei Kosygin, the Prime Minister, launched a series of reforms that aimed to unleash creativity within the decision-making process and improve productivity. His reforms, like those of Khrushchev, gave incentives to enterprise managers to use their resources more productively. He also attempted to make central planning take more notice of cost and profit rather than the Stalinist approach of using quantity produced as the main indicator of economic success.

Kosygin's reforms had much to commend them, but little was achieved. Reformers may have had influence at the top of government, but reforms were implemented by officials who were not just unenthusiastic about them, but often hostile. Central planners disliked reforms that made them accountable for policies they had less control over. Brezhnev sympathised with the conservatives in the Party and sabotaged the reforms. The reforms were watered down to the point where they were ineffective. Bonuses for output were higher than bonuses for 'innovation', so managers preferred to stay with safe and tried methods. The focus on bonuses for profit encouraged some enterprises to make fewer, more expensively-priced items rather than mass produce cheaper, and often much needed, items. Kosygin was sidelined by Brezhnev in 1968 and given a role in foreign affairs.

Reforms under Brezhnev

Further reforms were tried during Brezhnev's time as leader, showing that reformers still retained some influence.

- In 1973, major industrial complexes were joined with scientific research institutions in an attempt to ensure that the latest technology was applied to production. Brezhnev talked of 'an alliance of the working class with science'.
- The system of targets was further centralised in 1974. These new targets attempted to move away from using merely output figures to focus more on cost and profit.

These reforms were little more than tinkering with the system. Attempts to adopt new technology were limited by the rigid nature of the command economy. Managers feared losing production while new machinery was installed in factories. The result was that the new equipment was often left to rust as the factory continued to achieve its output target with old machinery. The use of cost and profit indicators to judge performance was not always helpful in an economic system where prices were set by the government with little reference to **supply and demand**.

KEY TERM

Supply and demand
This is the principle by which prices are decided in a free-market economy. Prices reflect the demand for a particular product compared with the amount of the product available (supply). In the Soviet economy, this principle did not operate because prices were set by the government.

Consumer goods and the Ninth Five-Year Plan (1971–75)

Khrushchev's push for greater consumer goods was continued by Brezhnev, and the Ninth Five-Year Plan placed a particular emphasis on this. The rate of growth in the production of consumer goods was higher than that of heavy industry. Goals were not fulfilled, but the growth achieved was still impressive and living standards rose. By 1980, 85 percent of families had televisions and 70 percent had washing machines. Only nine percent of families had a car, although investment in public transport was high. Brezhnev had persuaded the 'metal eaters' that resources must continue to be given to consumer industries and agriculture. This was despite the influence of the military-industrial complex, which remained so powerful that it often took decisions without informing other members of the Politburo.

Agriculture during the Brezhnev years

As in industry, Khrushchev's decentralising schemes for agriculture were reversed. Power was returned to the Ministry of Agriculture and there was a deliberate move away from Khrushchev's approach of trying to find quick solutions using pet schemes. The Virgin Lands Scheme was dropped. The Politburo did accept that agriculture needed heavy investment and this feature of previous policy continued. By 1976, 26 percent of all investment was in agriculture. Fertilisers received particular attention. Brezhnev was also prepared to allow a bigger role for production on peasants' private plots.

The result of Brezhnev's policy was a steady rise in overall production accompanied by a steady decline in workers' productivity. The agricultural workforce was large and unskilled, equipment and machinery was prone to breaking down, roads were often impassable and much of the food produced rotted before it reached the market. One problem that occurred was the failure of food production to meet rising demand. The result was not famine, but a shortage of foodstuffs available in state shops. The gap was made up by private production, as peasants sold their garden produce at private markets for considerably higher prices. In 1978, the price of food at the markets was double that of the food in the state shops. Private plots made up one percent of the cultivated area but were producing 25 percent of all produce.

The government experimented with ways in which to increase productivity and a brigade system was introduced. This allowed peasants on collectives to form work brigades that could decide how profit was used and distributed. The theory was that this system would act as an incentive by bringing in an element of payment by results for the brigade and individuals within the brigade. Signs that this method was successful worried Party officials, who feared a return to family farming. As a result, the experiment was abandoned.

Little was changed to a system of agriculture dominated by high levels of investment and inefficiency. As the historian Nove has stated, it had become 'The most gigantic agricultural subsidy in human history' (1992). A key sign of failure was the continued import of US wheat.

The attempted reforms of Andropov

Andropov's brief time as General Secretary between 1982 and 1984 was marked by a further attempt to improve economic performance. It is evident that Andropov recognised the need for reform, but rather than change the system he believed it could be made to work better by a tougher, more disciplined approach. The focus of his economic policy was the removal of corruption from within the system, whereby production figures were falsified in order to give the impression of targets being fulfilled. Large amounts of materials were literally stolen from state enterprises and diverted into private production for the black market. For example, making dresses a few centimetres shorter would save fabric for private production and the target for the state factory would still be met.

Andropov also wished to improve labour discipline. The Soviet workforce suffered from widespread absenteeism and alcoholism. Government officials conducted spot checks looking for slackers. It was not an approach that made Andropov popular. All it achieved was to add to the resentment many felt towards the government. Andropov encouraged people to come forward with new ideas for improving production, but what do you say to a former head of the KGB (secret police)?

Economic decline

Evidence of economic decline

By the 1980s, economic growth in the USSR was in steady decline. The 1950s had seen growth rates of seven percent, the 1960s saw growth rates of five percent and the 1970s saw a decline to just three percent. The vast Soviet economy seemed to be grinding to a halt. The situation was often worse than production figures indicated because output was usually expressed in terms of the value of goods produced, and this was based on prices decided by the government. Production figures could be raised by a mere bureaucratic decision.

The fixation with output masked serious underlying problems with economic performance. Quality was sacrificed in a push for quantity. Shoddy goods were a constant complaint of the Soviet population. Many goods produced were of such poor quality that they were left to rot in storage. A common grumble by the population was that Soviet condoms (notoriously thick and insensitive) contained more rubber than car tyres (notoriously thin and prone to bursting).

Focus on increases in quantity also hid poor levels of productivity. For example, Soviet agriculture used over 25 percent of the workforce, 26 percent of investment, and cultivated an area larger than that cultivated in the USA, yet it produced only one-sixth of the US output. Waste was a serious problem in industry, as was environmental damage. Neither was a major concern so long as production targets were met.

The evidence of decline might be disguised, but not even the Soviet Politburo was ignorant of the weaknesses in economic performance.

Reasons for economic decline

Was the economic decline of the Soviet Union caused by a failure of leadership? In a command economy, where power resides largely at the centre of the government apparatus, it would seem appropriate to place responsibility for decline with the Party leadership. Brezhnev was, in many ways, a fitting symbol of the failure to act; age had rendered him as immobile as the huge Soviet economic system. His cautious, conservative approach had entrenched Party officials and administrators who were resistant to change. Yet Brezhnev, like most in the Politburo, knew that reform was needed and he did allow reforms, however limited, to be attempted. Brezhnev was in many ways a product of the system he had inherited.

- **The legacy of the Stalinist system**
  The Stalinist approach had been geared towards rapid growth in industrial output to bring about rapid industrialisation in the 1930s and reconstruction after the Second World War. The move towards efficiency and quality was more difficult to achieve in the highly centralised system of planning laid down in the Stalin period. Bureaucrats, whose careers had blossomed during this time, were resistant to change.
- **Problems inherent in a command economy**
  Central control did not encourage initiative and creativity in the system. Experimentation at local level by individual managers was perceived as a threat to the power of central planners and any reforms to encourage decentralisation were thwarted by Party structures. Under Brezhnev, the leadership preferred to keep Party officials happy rather than encourage growth. The use of government-set prices and costs when planning and measuring economic performance did not help identify or solve issues of inefficiency. Central planning proved too rigid and inflexible for a complex modern economy. Production of everything from coal to shoes was decided by central planners, who could not cope with changes in circumstances or trends in fashion. For example, targets for women's bras of each size were decided by 'the Plan' but could easily be undone by changes in the physical size of Soviet women. The result was yet another shortage.
- **The 'social contract'**
  The contract between government and workforce built in a failure to grasp the issue of inefficiency. There was an unstated but understood contract that the government would provide employment and reasonable standards of living in return for workers' compliance. This made the government unwilling to use the ultimate sanction of economic failure, the closure of factories and unemployment. This resulted in large numbers of workers doing very little of real productive use. Hence the Soviet workers' saying, 'We pretend to work and they pretend to pay us'.

- **Lack of investment**
  Investment in agriculture increased during the Khrushchev and Brezhnev years but it was not enough to address the chronic underfunding it had received under Stalin. Storage facilities, rural transport and reliable machinery were in very short supply throughout the Soviet period.
- **Outdated technology**
  Soviet successes had been in areas that were becoming outdated. Soviet production of steel, cement, oil and pig iron exceeded that of the USA by the end of the 1970s, but these were vital elements of an industrial power that were giving way to the requirements of a post-industrial society based on microchips and computers. By the 1980s, the USSR was struggling to keep up to date with the technological advances made in the West. Brezhnev's policy of coupling industries with scientific research institutions in the 1970s helped, but it could not solve the increasing use of outdated methods. In recognition of this, the Soviet government signed deals with the West in order to gain access to new technologies. Agreements were made with Fiat and Renault to import car-making technology into the USSR, but the impact rarely extended beyond the plant in which it were used. By 1980, most Soviet technology was old and physically worn out.
- **The dominance of the military-industrial complex**
  This soaked up at least 18 percent of Soviet resources and employed 30 million people out of a working population of 150 million. Brezhnev's foreign policy involved increasing intervention in the developing world and this made expenditure on arms and defence necessary. These resources could have been switched, at least in part, to consumer industry and agriculture.

The causes of economic decline pre-dated Brezhnev's time in office but had become obvious to all during his rule. The command economy had performed well when the focus was on improving output of a limited number of products. It was far less effective when continued growth depended on gains in quality and efficiency. The system had become increasingly complex and overburdened. Despite being overworked, central planners preferred to hold onto a system that gave them power and influence. As the guarantor of the power and privileges of the Party, Brezhnev was the leader they both wanted and deserved. By the early 1980s ill-health rendered Brezhnev and his successors, Andropov and Chernenko, incapable of initiating meaningful reform. The failure to grapple successfully with the economy was an important factor in the impending crisis that led to the collapse of the Soviet Union.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

Soviet economic policy, 1964–85

1 **a)** Make a list of the economic reforms undertaken during the period 1964–85.

  b) Rate each reform according to its effectiveness.

2 List the differences and similarities between Khrushchev's economic policy and that of the Brezhnev years.

3 Assess the degree of change that had occurred between 1964 and 1985. What words would you use to describe the nature of this change?

Conclusions

From the seizure of power in 1917, the Communist regime had taken measures to extend its control over the economy. The extent of this control varied during the years 1917–21, from providing state direction to the more extensive control adopted during the civil war. The unpopularity of War Communism resulted in a subsequent step back towards a mixed economy of private and state ownership under the NEP in 1921, but the political pressures for pushing towards a command economy remained. Stalin's Five-Year Plans from 1928 brought the economy under state control and this brought enormous benefits in modernising the Soviet Union's economy and was able to meet the demands of the Second World War and post-war reconstruction. Yet, it also established an economic system that contained more negative features: it was a command economy that displayed alarming rigidity, a lack of focus on consumer goods, prioritised industry at the expense of agriculture and lacked enterprise and initiative. The reforms attempted during the period 1953 to 1985 were designed to address these problems. The fact that these reforms were to have only limited success showed that the economic system established under Stalin was too entrenched to allow more fundamental change without challenging the political power of the Party. This was the central dilemma of the Soviet economy.

ACTIVITY
SUMMARY

Economic policy, 1917–85

Look at the list of Soviet leaders:

Lenin; Stalin; Khrushchev; Brezhnev; Andropov

1 Rank these leaders in terms of the success of their economic policies.

2 For each leader identify the factors that (a) promoted and (b) hindered economic change.

3 Discuss the following statement: 'The performance of the Soviet economy between 1917 and 1985 shows the failure of a command economy.' How far would you agree with this view? Explain your answer.

AS Level Exam-Style Question Section A

Was the failure of Khrushchev's agricultural policies the main reason for economic problems in the USSR in 1964–82? (20 marks)

Tip

Think about the economic problems caused by Khrushchev's failures in agricultural policy (rather than just stating what his policies were). Focus on discussing whether you think this failure was the 'main reason' for economic problems. For example, were the economic problems of the USSR the result of failures to restructure industry as well as agriculture? Were these two areas of policy linked?

A Level Exam-Style Question Section A

How far was Soviet economic decline in the period 1964–85 a result of a failure of leadership? (20 marks)

Tip

This question requires careful explanation of how the Soviet leadership failed to address the issue of economic performance and requires you to assess the importance of this factor. Try to link factors rather than list them. Was it the leadership that failed or the system they headed?

ACTIVITY
WRITING

The Soviet economy in the 1980s

Use the words in the list below to complete these sentences so that they best describe the weaknesses of the Soviet economy in the early 1980s.

discouraged; diminishing; non-productive; exacerbated; military-industrial complex; productivity; inertia; stemmed

By the 1980s, the Soviet economy was showing signs of serious weakness. Many of these ..... from the fact that it was essentially a command economy. Control was exercised from Moscow by bureaucrats that were protective of their own power and influence. Any reforms attempted were seen as a threat and were .....

This produced a growing sense of .....

Despite increased investment and improvements in production, living standards remained low as more resources were used with ..... returns.

Problems were ..... by the diversion of considerable resources to the ..... These resources were ..... and starved other sectors of the economy of materials, technology and labour that could have been used in the promotion of consumer goods, which would have had a more beneficial impact on .....

THINKING HISTORICALLY Change (4b&c)

The bird's-eye view

The development	Medium-term consequences	Long-term consequences
The introduction of the NEP, 1921	The Soviet economy was stimulated by the reintroduction of elements of private enterprise	The NEP was replaced by the First Five-Year Plan in 1928, which brought an end to the private enterprise encouraged by the NEP. After the death of Stalin in 1953, the NEP was sometimes viewed as a model of how a mixed economy could be used to promote initiative and growth. In the 1980s, Gorbachev was keen on applying some of the features of the NEP to improve Soviet economic performance. Russian politicians still use it to highlight the relative role of private and state ownership in the economy.

Imagine you are looking at the whole of History using a zoomed-out interactive map like Google Maps. You have a general view of the sweep of developments and their consequences, but you cannot see much detail. If you zoom in to the time of the introduction of the NEP, you can see the event in detail but will know nothing of its consequences in the medium or long term. If you zoom out to look at the medium- or long-term consequences, you will know about them in detail but will know very little about the events that cause them, for example, the Tambov Rising and the Kronstadt Mutiny.

Look at the table above and answer the following.

1 What were the immediate consequences of the NEP?

2 In what ways are the medium-term consequences different to the long-term consequences?

Work in groups of three.

Each student takes the role of the teacher for one of the above (the development, medium-term consequences or long-term consequences) and gives a short presentation to the other two. They may comment and ask questions. After each presentation, the other two group members write a 100-word paragraph showing how the presentation links to their own.

Answer the following individually:

1 What happens to the detail when you zoom out to look at the whole sweep of history?

2 What are the advantages and disadvantages of zooming in to look at a specific time in detail?

3 How could you use the map in order to get a good understanding of history as a whole?

WIDER READING

Most general surveys of the Soviet Union provide coverage of economic policy. More detailed accounts include:

Barnett, V. 'The Soviet Economy – an Experiment that was Bound to Fail?', *History Review* (2005).

Davies, R. W. *Soviet Economic Development from Lenin to Khrushchev*, Cambridge (1998)

Holland, A. *Russia and its Rulers 1855–1964*, Hodder Education (2010)

Kenez, P. *A History of the Soviet Union from the Beginning to the End*, second edition, Cambridge University Press (2006)

Laver, J. *The Modernisation of Russia 1856–1985*, Heinemann Advanced History, Heinemann (2002)

Nove, A. *An Economic History of the USSR 1917–1991*, Penguin (1992)

Oxley, P. *Russia 1855–1991: From Tsars to Commissars*, Oxford University Press (2001)

Suny, R. *The Soviet Experiment*, Oxford (1998)

Thompson, W. *The Soviet Union under Brezhnev*, Pearson (2003)

1.3 Control of the people, 1917–85

KEY QUESTIONS

- How did the Soviet government exercise control over the media, propaganda and religion?
- How did the use of the secret police change through the period 1917 to 1985?
- How effective was the Soviet government's use of culture and the arts?

In 1921, satirical writer Yevgeny Zamyatin produced the novel *We*. It portrayed a modern industrial society where government control over the people was taken to the extreme: where the state believes that free will is the cause of unhappiness, and citizens' lives are controlled with mathematical precision based on the system of industrial efficiency. Society is controlled through propaganda and everyone is spied upon by an ever-present secret police. People are referred to by their number. Zamyatin's book provided a satirical view of the direction the Soviet state was going in and it highlighted some of the features, albeit in an extreme form, that were to become characteristic of the Soviet state's control over its people. The book certainly hit a nerve with the Soviet government and it became the first book to be banned by the communist regime.

HOW DID THE SOVIET GOVERNMENT EXERCISE CONTROL OVER THE MEDIA, PROPAGANDA AND RELIGION?

TIMELINE OF DEVELOPMENTS IN THE MEDIA AND PROPAGANDA

November 1917 – Ban on all non-socialist newspapers

1921 – Development of voice radio in the USSR

1930s – Cult of Stalin develops

1958 – Mass production of televisions in the USSR begins

October 1917 – Bolsheviks seize power

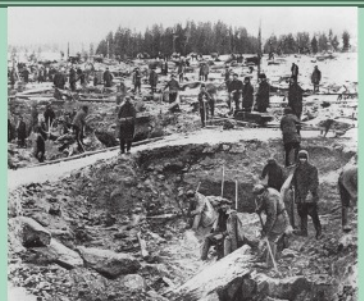
1917 – Establishment of the Cheka
Establishment of the Commissariat of Enlightenment

1930 – The Gulag set up: system of labour camps expanded

1934 – Secret police reformed as the NKVD



1915 1920 1925 1930 1935 1940 1945 1950



1928 – Cultural Revolution launched

1932 – Cultural Revolution ends. Socialist Realism promoted

1954 – KGB established

State control of mass media and propaganda

From the seizure of power in October 1917 until Gorbachev's election as General Secretary in 1985, Soviet mass media was characterised by state control through nationalisation, restriction of information and censorship. The purpose of control did not change, but the government had to adapt to changes in technology.

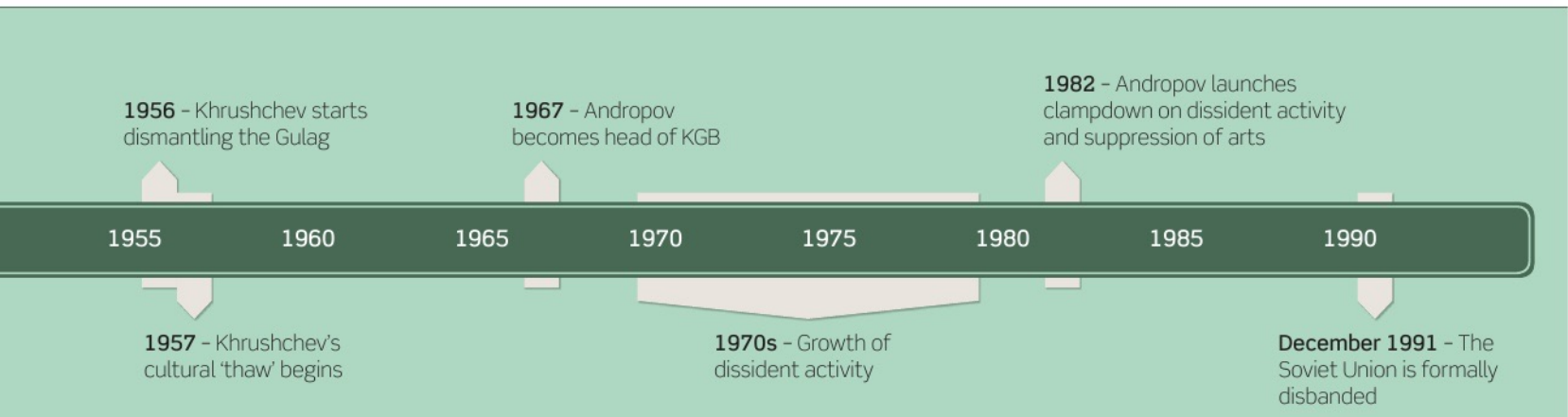
Newspapers

Lenin moved quickly to stamp on any signs of freedom of the press, viewing newspapers as mouthpieces of the bourgeoisie. A decree in November 1917 banned all non-socialist newspapers and, by the early 1920s, all non-Bolshevik papers were eliminated. The printing press was nationalised, with access restricted to those working in 'the interests of the workers and the Socialist order'. All editors and journalists were employees of the government, members of the Union of Soviet Journalists and expected to be Party members. Even within this set-up, the government felt it needed to ensure the press spoke with one voice. Approval from *Glavlit,* the censorship office, was needed for every article written for publication.

Daily newspapers included *Pravda* (Truth) and *Izvestiya* (News). *Pravda* was the newspaper of the Communist Party, while *Izvestiya* was the paper of the government; both were used as vehicles of propaganda, highlighting the achievements of the government and socialism. Their purpose was to act as an instrument of propaganda, agitation and organisation. The guiding principle of the Soviet press was *partiinost* (party-mindedness). To ensure a high readership, these papers were cheap to buy and widely available. Copies were posted on boards along pavements and at workplaces, enabling people to read them for free. In the absence of non-government papers, *Pravda* and *Isvestiya* were mass newspapers: *Pravda* had a circulation of 10.7 million in 1983. The paper of the government-controlled trade unions, *Trud* (Labour), was even more popular, with a print run of 13.5 million.

Newspapers carried endless details about the achievements of socialism, with production figures related to meeting or, better still, exceeding targets of the latest economic plan. This fixation was especially true of the 1930s, under Stalin's push to industrialise. Favoured topics also included successful expeditions to the Arctic and northern Russia in search of gold and oil that were part of a theme which struck a chord with many Soviet citizens: the triumph of technology over nature. The aviators who flew over the North Pole were presented as conquering heroes. They represented bravery, adventure and the pushing back of frontiers.

Prohibited topics, or those subject to delayed reporting, included plane crashes and natural disasters. In July 1972, a vast fire got out of control outside Moscow, but the city's population had to wait one month before the blue haze over the city was explained. By that time, the fire had been put out. A more serious disaster at Kyshtym, in September 1957, was simply ignored by the government's press agencies. A nuclear waste storage tank exploded, resulting in at least 200 fatalities and over 270,000 people being exposed to dangerous radiation levels. The Soviet public only became suspicious when keen map readers noticed that over 30 small communities had disappeared from Soviet maps between 1958 and 1991. In the absence of any acknowledged disaster, the government took two years to evacuate unsafe areas.



Local newspapers were more likely to publish views critical of the authorities, although limits were imposed on what was permissible. It was acceptable to print letters criticising minor bureaucrats, and complaints about poor housing became an increasingly common subject in the 1970s. However, criticising Party leaders was not allowed.

Magazines

Alongside the diet of daily newspapers was a vast selection of magazines and journals to cater for an ever-increasing range of interests. Many of these were aimed at specific groups of workers, such as farmers, soldiers or teachers. Others were aimed at young children, sports fans and those with a particular hobby. Some areas of interest were off-limits: sex, pornography, crime and religion were among those topics the government had no wish to encourage.

Newspapers often gave sports coverage little attention and the gap for sports fans was filled by *Red Sport*, established in 1924, and (after 1946) by its successor *Sovetskii Sport*. *Sovetskii Sport* was a hugely popular magazine that gained respect for its accuracy and honesty in sports coverage, even if it had to carry political news praising the government on its front page.

Radio

In 1917, radio was a fairly recent development and therefore easier for the Bolsheviks to influence. It did not have a long tradition of independent activity. Radio had broadcast news of the Revolution in October 1917 in Morse code. Soviet scientists quickly developed voice radio and by 1921 programmes were being broadcast. The *Spoken Newspaper of the Russian Telegraph Agency* featured news and propaganda material, with little emphasis on music. Radio receivers were expensive, and in order to get their message to the people, the Bolsheviks installed loudspeakers in public places, factories and clubs. Group listening also resulted in a collective response that ensured everyone got the intended message. Control of radio communications was centralised through the Commissariat for Posts and Telegraph and, as the government recognised the importance of this form of communication, resources were given to ensure rapid development. By 1922, Moscow had a well-developed broadcasting station.

Radio was an especially useful medium because it enabled the government to get its message across to the 65 percent of the population who were illiterate. Radio stations were controlled by the government, and by the 1920s they conveyed the official message alongside light or classical music to make it more palatable. The speed by which the government could convey its message through radio was to prove invaluable during the German invasion of 1941. With German forces less than 50 miles from Moscow, Stalin gave a speech live on radio from Red Square, in the centre of Moscow, to commemorate the October Revolution. It was to prove highly effective in reassuring the Soviet population that not all was lost in the war.

Most new apartment blocks were wired for radio reception, thereby access was restricted to government stations only. Until 1964 there was only one Soviet radio station. Under Brezhnev, the range was extended to three, including *Radio Maiak* (Lighthouse), which played some foreign music and was popular with Soviet youth.

The government tried to restrict access to foreign stations by mass-producing cheap radios with a limited reception range, but they also had to rely on jamming foreign broadcasts and threatening to arrest those that listened to stations such as Voice of America or the BBC. Although these threats rarely succeeded, the limits on the amount of information received by the Soviet population were important in restricting the level of public debate.

Television

By the 1950s, television was becoming a key method by which the government got its message to the Soviet public. In 1950, the USSR had 10,000 sets; by 1958 this number had risen to almost three million. Mass production of televisions in the 1960s brought their price within the range of most of the population, even if availability failed to keep pace with demand. By the early 1980s, most of the rural population had access to television.

The government stations provided a mix of news, documentaries on the achievements of socialism, and cultural programmes on ballet and the classical arts. Children's programmes were also provided and feature films made up a considerable proportion of the output. Life in the Soviet Union was presented as joyous, whereas life under capitalism was rife with crime, homelessness and violence. It was pretty uninspiring fare that failed to spark much enthusiasm in the population. By 1985, there were two television channels and greater emphasis on light entertainment. This was undemanding but more popular. In the 1970s, the Soviet singer Eduard Khil (*Trololo*) became a noted and popular celebrity, although his easy-listening style was not to everyone's taste. More positive features of Soviet television output included the broadcast of local programming for the regions of the USSR, often in local languages. Folk dancing was hardly cutting edge, but it made a change from the usual imposition of Russian culture on national minorities.

Results

Censorship and restriction of material were heavily used, if not always successfully. The Soviet public got used to reading between the lines. News of the heart problems of a member of the Politburo was interpreted as a fall from favour, as was someone's continued non-appearance in the press. Favoured and rising stars of the Party received more news space. In 1953, Soviet citizens who subscribed to the Soviet encyclopedia received a package that instructed them to remove pages from their collection that had details of Beria, the head of the secret police, and replace them with the insert provided (which contained extra pictures of the Bering Sea). It was the first sign the public had that Beria had been arrested.

The technology of mass media may have changed, but the government ensured that a steady diet of propaganda was conveyed. Alongside overt propaganda, the government came to rely increasingly on output that provided a distraction from the realities of socialism. By the 1980s, technology was advancing further. Video recorders were being mass-produced by the state, making the sharing of information among the public easier, but the rise of increasingly sophisticated technologies, including computers, was likely to provide a much more demanding challenge to a government wishing to restrict its population's access to information.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

The media and propaganda

1 Which was the most important method of mass media used by the Soviet government between 1917 and 1985: newspapers, radio or television? Give reasons for your choice.

2 Make a list of the uses and limitations of each method. Try to give precise examples to support your points.

The personality cults of Stalin, Khrushchev and Brezhnev

A recurring theme of Soviet propaganda was the tendency of individual leaders to develop a **cult of personality**, whereby their qualities and achievements as leader were highlighted. The focus on individual leaders, which often reached ridiculous levels, went against the socialist emphasis on the collective. It was one of the features of Stalin's rule that led Trotsky to accuse him of betraying the Revolution, of turning a dictatorship of the proletariat into a personal dictatorship. Khrushchev also used the accusation as part of his criticism of Stalin in his Secret Speech of 1956 yet, by 1964, when Khrushchev was dismissed, one of the accusations made against him was that he had also created his own cult of personality. Brezhnev may have enjoyed less personal power than Stalin and Khrushchev, but he too developed a cult of personality that gave him the appearance and trappings of power.

KEY TERM

Cult of personality
The adoration of an individual through the use of art and popular culture. It was used as a method of enhancing the status of an individual leader and creating a sense of loyalty to them. Similar cults had been developed by other dictators in the same period as Stalin, such as Mussolini and Hitler.

SOURCE 1 The cult of Stalin: a painting of Stalin at the Dneiper Dam project, c1900. The slogan reads 'Glory to Stalin, the Great Father of Communism'.



Why was a cult of personality used?

A cult of personality was used to reinforce the power of individual leaders and detach them from the collective leadership exercised in theory by the Politburo. Thus, as individual leaders wanted to raise their power and status above that of their colleagues, the cult of personality became a useful tool.

The Soviet government was to develop two cults of personality in the 1920s and 1930s. As soon as Lenin was buried, he was being hailed as the hero of the Revolution. Images of Lenin appeared in many forms. The newspapers, statues and the cinema all contained endless images of Lenin. His likeness was used to motivate the population to imitate his commitment to the Revolution. The embalming of Lenin's body for display in the mausoleum in Red Square, in the centre of Moscow, was the most striking example of the use of Lenin as a focus for political purposes. Petrograd was renamed Leningrad in 1924 in honour of his achievements for the Revolution. There is no doubt that there was a wave of support for Lenin at the time of his death and the Soviet government was able to build on this. The long queues to see the embalmed body of Lenin were evidence of this support. Throughout the history of the Soviet Union, the cult of Lenin was used by successive leaders to support their claim to be the legitimate heirs of Lenin and the socialist order. The other cult that developed was that of Stalin, who actively promoted himself as the worthy defender of the work of Lenin. This was useful to reinforce Stalin's claim to be Lenin's rightful successor.

The cult of Stalin

The cult of Stalin was invaluable in supporting Stalin's career: firstly, by linking him to Lenin to highlight his loyalty to the Lenin legacy during his manoeuvring for power in the 1920s; secondly, as a way of reinforcing his personal dictatorship in the 1930s.

Key features included the following:

- In the first phase, attempts were made to highlight the links between Stalin and Lenin, even where none existed. Stalin was presented as Lenin's closest colleague, a hero of the civil war and the saviour of the Revolution in the face of assaults from its enemies such as Leftists and Rightists. Trotsky was removed from photos and pictures.
- As early as 1925, the town of Tsaritsyn was renamed Stalingrad.
- Soon after Lenin's death in 1924, the slogan 'Stalin is the Lenin of today' became widely used by sections of the rank and file Party membership.
- In the 1930s, images of Stalin were used to reinforce his power by giving the impression of the all-present and all-knowing leader. Artists set to work presenting images of 'the big hero' or *Vozhd* (the boss). Portraits of Stalin made the rough Georgian peasant look like a Hollywood film star, but it did require a lot of soft focus!
- Images portrayed Stalin as a benefactor, inspiration and defender of socialism. Paintings identified Stalin with the achievements of the Five-Year Plans, for example Stalin posing at the Ryon hydro-electric complex in 1935. Pictures of Stalin with children were common, emphasising his role as a father figure. The children are often presenting him with flowers and always looking up to their hero.
- Posters of Stalin in military uniform were common during the Second World War. Images of Stalin in front of masses of Soviet troops and military hardware clearly conveyed the message that Stalin was the defender of Mother Russia. Propaganda posters also highlighted Stalin as a man of the people, with images of Stalin and worker, Stalin and peasant, and so on. These were ironic images given that Stalin rarely met the average Soviet citizen after 1930. Yet Stalin was always presented as a down-to-earth man, happy in his rather plain clothes and smoking a pipe. The sheer number of images presented through paintings, photos and statues had an intimidating impact on the Soviet public.
- In official biographies, Stalin's early life was embellished and quite often invented. His family home in Georgia was turned into a shrine. A happy family life was invented, with Stalin as a devoted son despite the fact that he only saw his mother three times in 40 years and he often referred to her as the 'old whore'. An official *History of the All-Union Communist Party* was published in 1938 that gave Stalin a prominent role in all the policy developments since Lenin's death. According to the Short Course, as the book became known, Stalin's role had been essential in saving the Revolution. This was less history than pure **hagiography**, with Stalin presented as a genius to be praised. An official biography of Stalin by G. F. Alexandrov was to follow in 1947.

KEY TERM

Hagiography
Writing which deliberately praises a person, turning them into a saint-like figure, often regardless of the facts. It had been used in the Middle Ages to describe deeds and miracles attributed to a holy person. Soviet biographies were often uncritical of their subjects and placed responsibility for great achievements on individual leaders.

SOURCE 2 From G. F. Alexandrov, *Stalin, a Short Biography*, published in English in 1947 by Foreign Languages Publishing House. The book was commissioned and approved by Stalin.

> [Stalin was]... the genius, the leader and teacher of the Party, the great strategist of Socialist revolution, helmsmen of the Soviet State and captain of armies... His work is extraordinary for its variety; his energy truly amazing. The range of questions which engage his attention is immense, embracing complex problems of Marxist-Leninist theory and school textbooks...
>
> Everyone is familiar with the cogent and invincible force of Stalin's logic, the crystal clarity of his mind, his iron will, his devotion to the party, his ardent faith in the people, and love for the people. Everybody is familiar with his modesty...

- Stalin gathered titles and honours that increasingly sounded ridiculous, such as 'Brilliant Genius of Humanity' and 'Gardener of Human Happiness'.
- Poets were used to add to the quantity of material disseminated in praise of Stalin. One typical example was the 'Song About Stalin', composed by M. Izakvosky (see Source 3).
- Records of speeches by Stalin were hurriedly produced and distributed to the far reaches of the Soviet Union.
- Statues of Stalin were erected in most cities and towns. These statues gave Stalin the stature of Tsar Alexander III, one of the tallest Russian leaders. Stalin was, in reality, only 5 feet 6 inches (1.6 m) tall!
- Films for the cinema featuring Stalin were also used to highlight his prominent role in events. Actor Mikhail Gilovani made a career out of playing Stalin. The film *The Fall of Berlin* (1950) depicted Stalin's role in the fall of Berlin to the Red Army in 1945. In the film, Stalin received a rapturous welcome on his arrival in Berlin by plane. In reality, Stalin rarely flew and certainly did not visit Berlin until the Second World War was concluded.

By the late 1940s, the Stalin presented by his cult differed considerably from the real Stalin, so much so that when government officials saw Stalin in person walking in the grounds of the Kremlin they did not recognise the small, stooped man with grey hair and a pockmarked face as the 'great man' Stalin.

By the early 1950s, this cult of personality was to rise to ever more ridiculous heights. By 1953, many towns had been renamed after Stalin. The Volga-Don Canal may have carried little traffic, but it was littered with statues of Stalin along its banks.

The cult of personality was an orchestrated propaganda campaign, but it was not entirely manufactured. Certainly by the end of the Second World War, Stalin's popularity had grown and many Soviet citizens viewed him as a benefactor, inspiration and as the saviour of socialism and Mother Russia. Even those who did not like Stalin often had respect for him as a leader. It was telling that even prisoners in the Gulag wept when they heard of Stalin's death.

SOURCE 3 From 'Song About Stalin' by M. Izakvosky, written in the late 1930s.

> For the sake of our happiness
> He marched through all storms
> He carried our holy banner
> Over our enormous land.
> And fields and factories rose,
> And tribes and people responded
> To the call of our leader.
> He gave us for ever and ever
> Youth, glory and power.
> He has lit the clear dawn of spring
> Over our homes.
> Let us sing, comrades, a song
> About the dearest person,
> About our sun, about the truth of nations,
> About our Stalin let's sing a song.

The cult of Khrushchev

Khrushchev had condemned Stalin's use of a personality cult in his Secret Speech of 1956. He criticised its monstrous glorification of the leader at the expense of the role played by the Soviet people. Criticising the cult had political uses for Khrushchev as he pushed forward his policy of de-Stalinisation. However, there were to be advantages for Khrushchev in developing his own personality cult. For Khrushchev, a cult allowed him to be seen as the more important Party leader when power had originally been shared after 1953 with Malenkov. It also suited Khrushchev's style of leadership, which involved him personally meeting Soviet citizens on a much greater scale than Stalin. Visits to peasants on collective farms were good photo opportunities for the leader. This developed into adulation through articles, books and posters. Khrushchev's publicity increased when he appointed his son-in-law, Alexei Adzhubei, as editor of *Isvestiya*. The development of a cult partly reflected Khrushchev's egotistical personality. He also made use of radio, cinema and television for self-publicity, which took on a more desperate tone as Khrushchev's policy failures mounted. Khrushchev's cult was never on the scale of Stalin's – Khrushchev stopped short of commissioning a biography – but it was evident enough for it to be one of the stated reasons for his dismissal in 1964.

The cult of Brezhnev

For Brezhnev, a personality cult was useful after 1964 as Brezhnev sought to emerge as 'first among equals' in the power struggle with Kosygin and Podgorny that followed Khrushchev's removal. However, Brezhnev's cult of personality was less a method of securing power than a substitute for real power.

There is no doubt that Brezhnev was a popular leader and one of the key reasons for this popularity was his reluctance to use his power to bring about change. The cult gave Brezhnev the symbols of power without having to exercise it. Brezhnev was content with the trappings of power, especially the endless medals he was awarded. A Soviet joke made fun at Brezhnev's expense by suggesting that Brezhnev was having his chest expanded to accommodate more medals. He was awarded at least 100 medals, including the Lenin Prize for Literature for his memoirs, a poorly written account that greatly exaggerated his role in the Second World War. Brezhnev was not unaware of the ridiculous aspects of his cult but, strangely, it does not seem to have affected his popularity. As he said, 'If they are poking fun at me, it means they like me.'

The personality cult took on a more practical element after 1975 when Brezhnev's health deteriorated. A series of strokes and heart attacks left Brezhnev incapacitated. Historian Roy Medvedev claimed that for the last six years of his life Brezhnev was clinically dead. With the leader unable to function, the cult at least provided the appearance of leadership to the Soviet population.

The advantages of the cult for the Party

There is no denying that a personality cult served the political interests of the leader who was the subject of the cult. Nonetheless, there were also advantages for the Party itself. It was useful to have one person as a focus for unity and loyalty, especially during the tumultuous period of the Five-Year Plans of the 1930s and at a time of war. The cult provided a human face for socialism, which remained a rather abstract concept to many poorly educated Russians. It provided a figurehead that the population could identify with the state. The cult of personality made use of traditional Russian attitudes; the population had been used to expressing their loyalty to the country through one person during the rule of the tsars. The cult also filled a gap resulting from the severe restrictions on religious worship.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

The cult of personality

1 List the methods used to support the cult of personality.

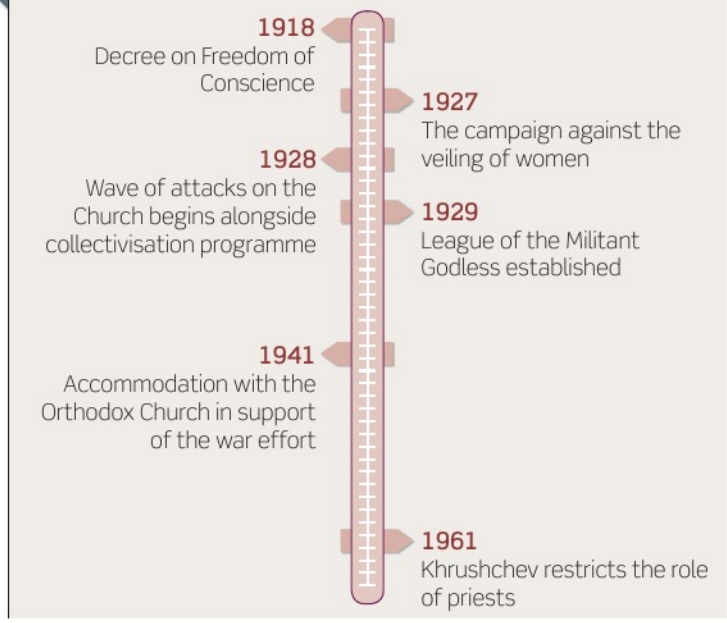
2 In what ways did the cult of personality change to reflect the subject of the cult?

Attacks on religious beliefs and practices

The Russian Orthodox Church

The Bolsheviks saw religion and its institutions as a threat to the imposition of socialist ideology. To the Bolsheviks, the Church provided an alternative ideology to that of Marxism. Christianity's emphasis on the rights of the individual contrasted with the collective mentality of socialism. The Bolsheviks were atheists who dismissed religion as little more than superstitious nonsense. Lenin had a particular hatred for priests and this informed the pace and tone of Bolshevik policy. There was a concern that the power and influence of the **Russian Orthodox Church** as an instrument of social control posed a threat to the imposition of socialist values and government control.

TIMELINE OF RELIGIOUS POLICY



The Russian Orthodox Church had been tied closely to the old order; the tsar had been its head and the majority of the population took the word of their spiritual leaders seriously. Therefore, it was a large task the Bolsheviks set themselves when they aimed to destroy the Church and the influence of religion in general. There was to be no '**opium of the masses**' other than communism.

EXTEND YOUR KNOWLEDGE

The Russian Orthodox Church

The Russian Church had been closely connected to the Tsarist regime. The tsar had been the head of the Church and used it to serve the purposes of the state. Appointments within the Church were subject to the approval of the tsar and this ensured that the Church would support the government and its policies. Under the tsar, the religious hierarchy of the Church was headed by the Patriarch, with the Metropolitan of Moscow being another key post. The hold of the Church over the rural population was an important instrument in social control. As an organisation, the Church owned a considerable amount of land and therefore tended to have the same interests as the landed classes. It was both Tsarist and deeply conservative in its attitudes and, therefore, not a supporter of the new regime.

Opium of the masses

This phrase was used by Karl Marx to describe the impact of religion on the population. He believed that religion was used by the ruling classes as a tool to keep the population under control. The phrase was first used by Marx in the introduction of his proposed work 'A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right', written in 1843. Although the book was never published, Marx used the phrase and idea behind it on many occasions thereafter. He believed that religion gave people an artificial sense of happiness by distracting them from their sufferings. Real happiness, Marx believed, could only be achieved if religion was abolished. The Communist Party in the Soviet Union aimed to get rid of religion, but realised that the government would need to use other methods to help the people discover their real happiness: propaganda was one such method.

A series of measures was introduced to severely limit the power and influence of religion:

- In 1918, the Decree on Freedom of Conscience separated the Orthodox Church from the state and it lost its privileged status. The Church was deprived of its land without compensation, its publications were outlawed and all religious education outside the home was banned.
- A large number of churches were destroyed or converted to other purposes. The government closed all monasteries and by the end of 1918 the head of the Orthodox Church, Patriarch Tikhon, was under house arrest.
- During the famine of the civil war, attacks on the Church increased and valuable objects were seized to help pay for food supplies. Priests were deprived of the vote, denied rations during the civil war and suffered as victims of the Red Terror of 1921–22. By 1923, 28 bishops and more than 1,000 priests had been killed.
- In 1929, the League of the Militant Godless was established by the Bolsheviks as part of a propaganda campaign against religion. It launched events to disprove the existence of God which included taking peasants for plane rides to show them heaven did not exist in the sky. Weeping icons were ridiculed, with demonstrations of how they could be operated by rubber squeezers.
- Religious rituals were attacked and there was a campaign to replace baptisms with 'Octoberings'. New names, such as Revolyutsiya and Ninel (Lenin spelt backwards), were encouraged.

The scale of the attacks led many Church leaders to seek an accommodation with the regime and Patriarch Tikhon's death in 1925 opened the way for Metropolitan Sergei of Moscow to call on Church members to support the government. Most refused, but the new tone resulted in less strident attacks by the government against the Church. Nonetheless, by the end of 1930, four-fifths of all village churches were either no longer operating or had been destroyed.

Bolshevik actions had severely restricted the Orthodox Church but failed to stamp out its influence. Surveys of the peasantry in the mid-1920s revealed that 55 percent were still active Christians.

Changes to religious policy under Stalin

A campaign of religious repression accompanied Stalin's policy of collectivisation. More churches were closed and village priests were labelled as 'kulaks' and deported. Further attacks followed during the Great Purge of 1936–39, and by 1939 only 12 out of 163 bishops were still at liberty. It was not until the German invasion of the USSR in 1941 that policy changed. The Church supported the war effort and this prompted an accommodation between Church and state. Stalin took a more liberal approach to the Church; the patriarchate was re-established, some churches reopened and new seminaries were set up to train priests. There was some acknowledgement that religion could play a beneficial role in sustaining morale during the hardships of war.

Khrushchev's anti-religious campaign

Khrushchev was fervently anti-religious and pursued a programme of active repression similar to that of Stalin before the Second World War. In 1958–59 Khrushchev launched a harsh anti-religious campaign that continued until his removal from office in 1964. The role of the priest was limited to one of spiritual advice only. Parish councils were placed under the control of Party officials who often took action to dismiss priests on the grounds that they were no longer needed. Within four years, 10,000 of the existing churches were closed. Surviving priests were often harassed by the secret police. Baptists and Jews also suffered from severe restrictions on their right to congregate and worship.

Brezhnev's policies towards the Church

With the fall of Khrushchev in 1964, active persecution of the Church declined. Brezhnev was aware that stories of religious persecution did not go down well in the West and had a damaging impact on the USSR's attempts to conduct foreign policy. Brezhnev was therefore happy to allow the Church to act within its defined limits.

The government used the Council of Religious Affairs to monitor religious services and clergy were classified according to loyalty to socialism. The Orthodox Church was expected to stick to formal church services and support Soviet policies, especially social policy where the Church could provide facilities, such as help for the poor.

Not all Church members were satisfied with this submissive attitude to the state. In 1976, a group of Orthodox priests set up the Christian Committee for the Defence of Believers' Rights to draw attention to human rights abuses. This was a step too far for Brezhnev: its leader, Father Yakunin, was sentenced to five years' imprisonment for anti-Soviet propaganda in 1979.

Those religious groups, such as Jews and Baptists, who were more likely to be critical of the regime were treated with less tolerance. Their evangelical activities of preaching to gain converts were restricted. Prayer meetings were broken up and members dismissed from their jobs. Nonetheless, unregistered congregations continued to meet and distribute prayer books.

The influence of Islam

The majority of the population were, at least nominally, members of the Russian Orthodox Church, but other religions were of significant influence. The Central Asian regions of the Soviet Union contained a sizeable Muslim community. Dealing with Islam was a more difficult task for the Bolsheviks as it was more engrained into a distinct way of life and integrated within its community. The Bolsheviks feared that Islam's links to national minorities within the USSR might threaten the social cohesion of the state. In recognition of the hold of Islam, the Bolsheviks initially made little attempt to reduce the influence of **sharia law** courts, schools and **mullahs**. It was not until the mid-1920s that the government felt confident enough to attack Islamic institutions and rituals.

- Religious endowments of land were prohibited, making the upkeep of mosques more difficult.

KEY TERMS

Sharia law
The body of law that is used by Muslims to regulate their public and private life. It is based on the principles of Islam.

Mullah
A term commonly used for Islamic clerics and mosque leaders.

- Most mosques were closed down.
- Sharia courts were phased out.
- Mullahs were removed as part of the collectivisation process, often forced to publicly admit to being 'deceivers of the people'.
- The campaign against the veiling of women was launched on International Women's Day in 1927 when huge gatherings of women took part in a ceremony. They cast off their veils and threw them onto a bonfire.
- **Ramadan** fasting was condemned as interfering with work discipline.
- **Polygamy** was prohibited on the grounds of its subjection of women.

These measures resulted in a series of violent revolts in 1928–29, during which the Chechens of Southern Russia were particularly active. The unrest was only crushed through the use of Soviet armed forces. Many Muslims attempted to observe obedience to the state in public while retaining Islamic customs in private. Others joined underground brotherhoods, known as *tariqat*, to continue the fight for Islamic rights.

The results of religious policy

As in the case of the Orthodox Church, the impact of the Communist Party's attacks on Islam was to reduce the numbers engaged in active worship. A survey commissioned by the government during the 1980s found that only 25 percent of the population believed in God; far fewer were engaged in any religious worship. The influence of formal religious structures had declined considerably, but for those who remained faithful the actions of the government seemed to have intensified their religious commitment. An underground network of support developed that often provided sustenance to those whose needs were not met by the government.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

Religious policy

1 Make a list of the similarities and differences in religious policy towards the Orthodox religion and Islam.

2 Which religion do you think posed the greatest threat to the control of the Communist Party over the Soviet people? Justify your decision.

KEY TERMS

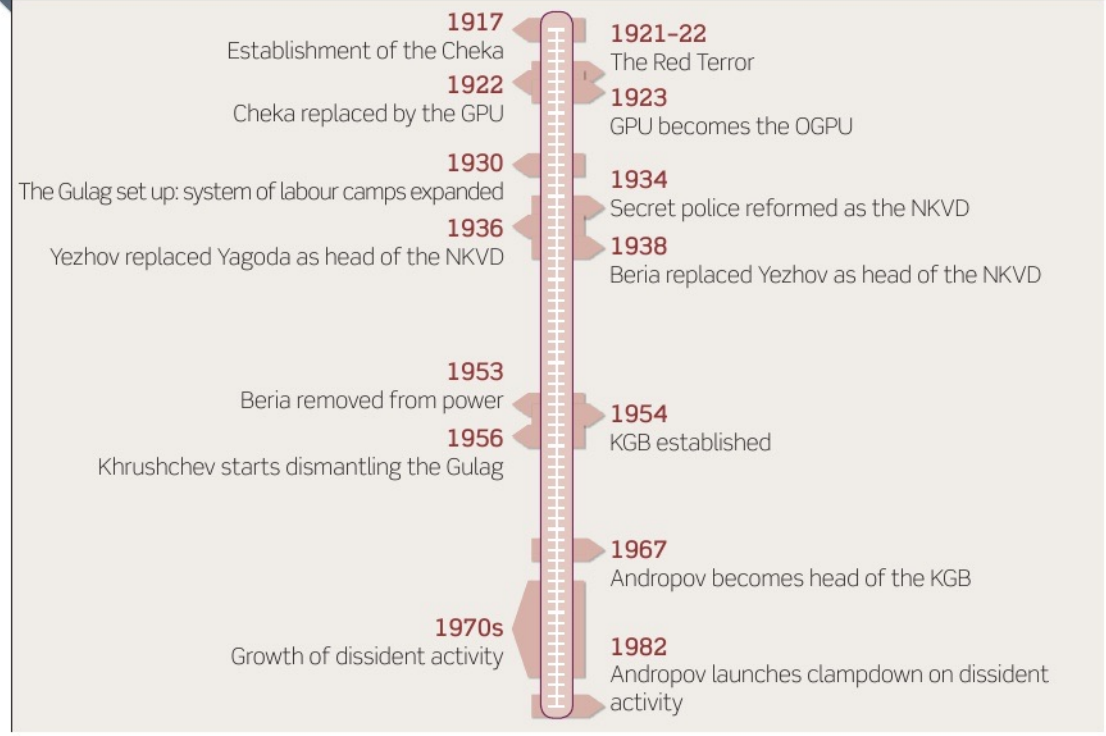
Ramadan
A period of fasting, usually for 30 days. It is a very significant act for Muslims, marking a period when they ask to be forgiven for their sins and remember the problems of the poor. It occurs in the month in which the first verses of the Qur'an were revealed to the Prophet Muhammad.

Polygamy
The practice of taking more than one woman as a wife.

HOW DID THE USE OF THE SECRET POLICE CHANGE THROUGH THE PERIOD 1917 TO 1985?

Government control over the people was reinforced by an atmosphere of terror, implemented through heavy use of an extensive state apparatus based on the activities of the secret police. Established by Lenin, the Bolsheviks' secret police force was enlarged greatly under Stalin and terror became an essential feature of Stalinist Russia. Although terror became less cruel after Stalin's death, it remained a key feature of Soviet life until the collapse of the USSR.

TIMELINE OF TERROR



Attacks on opponents of the government

Lenin had established a Bolshevik secret police, the Cheka, in 1917 under the leadership of Felix Dzerzhinsky. Its task was to act against counter-revolution and sabotage, a task it undertook with great ruthlessness. During the civil war, the Cheka were given powers that allowed it to act with minimal interference from other legal bodies. This meant that it could act quickly to deal with actual and perceived enemies. The attempted assassination of Lenin by Fanya Kaplin in August 1918 prompted a wave of arrests. The Cheka intensified its actions against Socialist Revolutionaries and Mensheviks during the Red Terror of 1921 and 1922. Up to 200,000 opponents were shot: execution now became the rule rather than the exception.

After the civil war, the secret police was reorganised. The Cheka was replaced by the **GPU** in 1922 and in the following year it became the OGPU. The significance of these changes was the growing independence of the secret police from interference from other state institutions. The secret police became a body that only took orders and instructions from the leadership of the Communist Party. The power of the secret police increased further in 1934, when the OGPU was merged with an enlarged Interior Ministry, referred to as the NKVD.

KEY TERM

GPU
The State Political Administration, the name given to the secret police in 1922. It was reorganised as the Unified State Political Administration (OGPU) in 1923.

Stalin's programme of rapid industrialisation under the Five-Year Plans had identified a range of opponents that needed to be dealt with to ensure the successful transformation of the Soviet Union. The kulaks and other peasants who opposed collectivisation were deported to the Gulag, run by the secret police.

The number of those identified as political opponents rose after the show trial of Zinoviev and Kamenev in 1936. The purges of the Right of the Party, such as Bukharin, and members of the Red Army, who were accused of working with foreign countries to undermine the USSR, resulted in widespread denunciations to the secret police.

Arrests were undertaken by the secret police, often in the middle of the night to disorientate the accused. They were then taken to the headquarters of the secret police at the Lubyanka building in Moscow, where they were subjected to torture until they confessed. The OGPU chief for Siberia, Leonid Zakovsky, had helpfully produced a widely used handbook on torture methods. For high-profile victims, a show trial would follow where the accused would admit their crimes before being sentenced to death. Part of the deal exacted with the accused was that a public confession would save the victim's family from prison – a promise not always kept. The other deal was naming associates in plots to undermine the state.

The roles of Yagoda, Yezhov and Beria

The role of Yagoda

Yagoda had become head of the secret police in 1934. He was keen to prove his loyalty to Stalin and this, coupled with his ambitious nature, resulted in a concerted attempt to build up his own empire.

Yagoda's time as head of the secret police saw the rapid expansion of the Gulag, the Chief Administration of Corrective Labour Camps. Labour camps had been used under Lenin, when they had been places for reforming class enemies. In 1930, the labour camps were expanded under the Gulag and transformed into a vast system of forced labour to support industrialisation.

- Yagoda used his influence with Stalin to ensure that the secret police could deal with these opponents without interference from the regular courts.
- The emphasis changed from ideology to economic considerations. The camps were to provide a pool of labour for exploiting the economic resources of the Soviet Union in areas where no one would live of their own free will. Those deported to labour camps were often placed in the most hostile of environments, where many died of extreme cold or starvation, a fate often shared by their guards and guard dogs.
- One of Yagoda's achievements was the completion of the White Sea Canal. This 141-mile canal used up to 180,000 labourers from the Gulag, digging by hand rather than using machines. The canal was completed under budget in less than two years but at the cost of at least 10,000 lives. To cut costs, the canal was only dug to a depth of 12 feet (3.6 m), making it useless for most shipping.

Yagoda's influence increased as the number of political opponents arrested rose when the Great Purge began in 1936. He was given the task of arresting those members of the Party who were alleged to have links with a Trotskyite opposition. Ultimately, and perhaps inevitably, recriminations eventually named Yagoda himself. In 1936, he was accused of incompetence in safeguarding Kirov, whose murder had precipitated the purges, and for not pursuing the opposition with sufficient enthusiasm. Yagoda was removed from office and Stalin had him shot in 1938.

SOURCE 4 A Gulag camp. Note the use of hand tools.



The role of Yezhov

Yagoda's replacement was Nikolai Yezhov, whose enthusiasm for personally torturing suspects had brought him to the attention of Stalin. At only 5 feet (1.5 m) tall, Yezhov was nicknamed the 'bloody dwarf'. Under his leadership, the NKVD indulged in the most excessive phase of the purges. One of his skills was to frame the purges in ideological terms by accusing those arrested of political opposition to communism and the communist state.

- The process of arrest, trial and imprisonment was speeded up by Yezhov. Courts (*Troikas*) made up of three people, one of whom was the regional NKVD boss, dealt with cases. In September 1937, the Karelian *Troika* processed 231 prisoners each day.
- Yezhov considered the Gulag to be underused and numbers of inmates rose considerably, as did deaths within the camps. In July 1937, Yezhov issued orders that required camps to meet quotas for the execution of prisoners. NKVD officers who carried out the executions were awarded medals, but were often executed themselves a few months later in order to meet quotas.
- The surveillance of the general public by the NKVD increased. Plain-clothes police officers were used, alongside a system of informers from the general public themselves, to collect information on the behaviour of individuals. Considerable use was made of the Soviet criminal code to condemn people for anti-Soviet activity. The number of detectives recruited to the NKVD quadrupled and extra staff were employed to torture suspects.
- Under Yezhov, the group of people considered opponents was widened to include anyone who did not show sufficient commitment to the Revolutionary cause. The clear message to the Soviet population was that stepping out of line was a serious threat to their continued freedom. Even the secret police were at threat from accusations, and it was during Yezhov's period of leadership of the NKVD that their own members were also purged.

Yezhov delighted in undertaking the torture of suspects himself and once attended a Politburo meeting with the cuffs of his shirt covered in fresh blood from torturing 'enemies of the Revolution'. Yet by 1938, Stalin seems to have become concerned that the heavy use of terror was demoralising the population at a time when war with Germany was looming. Yezhov, whose health began to suffer from his frenetic work rate and excessive drinking, was dismissed in 1938. Stalin accused him of being responsible for the excesses of the purges. There is no doubt that there was some truth in this accusation, but it suited Stalin to use Yezhov as a scapegoat as he wished to reduce the level of terror.

The role of Beria

The man appointed as the new head of the secret police was Lavrenti Beria, an energetic man of impressive organisational skills and unsavoury characteristics (see Extract 1). These qualities had brought him to the notice of Stalin even though Stalin was irritated by his excessive flattery. Beria had undermined Yezhov by briefing Stalin with criticisms of Yezhov's work in order to secure his removal and therefore his job.

EXTRACT 1

An account of Beria's behaviour from the historian Rupert Butler, *Stalin's Instruments of Terror* (2006).

> From the very start of his career, Beria had been heartily disliked by all. He was balding, short, and fleshy, with sensual lips and snake-like eyes glistening behind his professional pince-nez [eye glasses], and his sexual proclivities were both perverted and insatiable. His habit was to prowl the streets in his official limousine on the lookout for a young woman. When a suitable one was spotted, the driver was ordered to stop, seize her and throw her in the back of the car. She was then driven off to a quiet spot, where Beria raped her. Who dared complain?

Beria's appointment was viewed with some relief by the general population. Beria was presented as an uncle-like figure who would reform the excessive behaviour of the secret police. There was some truth in this perception. Beria felt that indiscriminate arrests were inefficient and a waste of manpower. A more productive method was needed. Beria reintroduced more conventional methods of police procedure and public trials were only held where solid evidence was available. Surveillance continued, but it only led to arrests when evidence was found. The arm of the Soviet secret police had a long reach. One of Beria's achievements was to oversee the murder of Trotsky, killed by a Stalinist agent in Mexico in 1940.

The focus on productivity also extended to the Gulag. Beria wanted to make the Gulag a profitable part of the Soviet economy. In 1939, food rations for inmates were improved, not due to humanitarian concerns but to get maximum work out of prisoners. Beria was instrumental in using the technical skills of inmates for specialist tasks. As a result, 1,000 scientists were put to work on various projects that – according to Beria's subsequent boasts – created many new pieces of military hardware. Although this claim was dubious, among the scientists were Andrei Tupolev, the aviation engineer, and Sergei Korolev, who played an essential part in the development of the Soviet space programme.

Early releases from the camps were cancelled so that prisoners' expertise could continue to be used. These measures resulted in a growth in Gulag economic activity from 2 billion roubles in 1937 to 4.5 billion roubles in 1940. Under Beria, the Gulag reached its biggest expanse. By the early 1950s, it was a major contributor to the Soviet economy. Over one-third of the country's gold and much of its timber and coal was produced through the Gulag.

Changes to the role of the secret police during the Second World War

The approach of the Second World War led to a strengthening of the powers of the secret police.

- In 1941 they were given some powers of supervision of the Red Army with responsibility for monitoring disloyalty and dealing with any desertions.
- The NKVD was given control over the process of deportations of those national minorities whose loyalty to the Soviet state was considered suspect. This included the Crimean Tartars, Volga Germans and Chechens. Their forcible removal to designated areas was particularly harsh. The process was conducted by three-person *Troikas* who were given powers outside the normal process of law.
- By 1943, the Red Army had started to overrun areas previously captured by the Germans. In these areas Beria set up Special Departments to root out traitors, deserters and cowards. Anyone suspected of co-operating with the Germans was either shot or deported to the Gulag. One department, called **SMERSH**, dealt with suspected spies and it was probably involved in the murder of more than 4,000 Polish officers at Katyn in 1943.
- Even Soviet troops who had escaped German capture were considered suspect. Order 270 treated all Soviet troops who had surrendered to the Germans during the initial invasion as traitors. Returning prisoners of war were automatically held in detention camps run by the secret police: some were used to clear minefields by simply walking through areas where mines had been laid by the enemy.

KEY TERM

SMERSH
A branch of the secret police whose task was to root out hostile elements in the Red Army. SMERSH was an acronym based on the phrase 'death to spies'. It was created in 1943. It later became a branch of the KGB whose main job was to arrange assassinations of opponents and dissidents. The organisation featured in several of Ian Fleming's James Bond novels.

Post-war rivalry

Stalin's last years saw a growing rivalry between members of the Politburo as Stalin's health began to fail. Beria saw the chance to use his role as head of the secret police to launch a fresh wave of purges to gain Stalin's favour. The target was the Leningrad branch of the Party. In 1949, over 2,000 members were imprisoned or exiled. Beria had gained considerable influence by undertaking Stalin's wishes. But Stalin was still the one with the power.

Stalin's next purges may well have been deliberate warnings to Beria. The Mingrelian Affair of 1951 involved a purge of the Party in Georgia. The purge seemed to be targeted at people who were of Mingrelian ethnicity, a group to which Beria belonged. In 1953, there is evidence that Stalin was planning another major purge before he died. In January a group of doctors were arrested, accused of trying to assassinate Stalin. The 'Doctors' Plot' was also notable in that most of the accused were Jewish. This may have been the prelude to a campaign of terror against Soviet Jews, but it was more likely to have been the first step towards the elimination of Beria and possibly other figures in the leadership. Certainly, statements that accused the secret police of a lack of vigilance must have concerned its head, Beria. Before the purge could take place, Stalin died.

Beria's power and influence at the time of Stalin's death was substantial. He controlled the secret police, the network of Soviet spies around the world, the Gulag system and its associated links to industry. Beria's enormous power was the reason why his Politburo colleagues moved so quickly to remove him from his position in June 1953. The lead was taken by Khrushchev, whom Beria had fatally underestimated as a 'moon-faced idiot'.

The impact of the removal of Beria on the use of terror

With Beria removed from power, the Politburo moved quickly to limit the independence of the secret police. It was brought firmly under Party control, answerable to a new organisation, the Soviet Security and Intelligence Service, otherwise known as the **KGB**. Khrushchev dismantled the Gulag system and forced labour never again played a part in the Soviet economy. Even the Lubyanka building ceased to be a prison. The last person to be held there was Gary Powers, the US pilot whose U-2 spy plane was shot down over the USSR in 1960.

KEY TERM

KGB
The Committee for State Security. It was established in 1954 and was the organisation that controlled the secret police. It had been set up after the death of Stalin to ensure that the secret police were brought back under Party control. Its main tasks were to deal with internal security, intelligence gathering both at home and abroad, and espionage. It also provided the bodyguard for Politburo members. It was run like a branch of the army, with military ranks. Yuri Andropov was head of the KGB from 1967 until he became General Secretary in 1982. Under his leadership, the KGB gained a reputation for its professionalism and effectiveness. It was no longer perceived as a group of thugs as had Stalin's secret police in the 1930s.

Responsibility for the apparatus of terror

It was a common saying of Gulag inmates that if only Stalin knew about their situation he would put an end to it. This view that Stalin had no role in the development of terror and the Gulag was naive in the extreme. Stalin did not create the Gulag system – it was already in existence under Lenin – but its growth was a consequence of the actions he pursued from 1928. The application of terror was something that Stalin took a particular interest in.

Evidence of Stalin's responsibility includes the following.

- Stalin personally signed many death warrants and often added comments on the lists of those arrested, asking his henchmen to add more names or adding names of his own choosing.
- Stalin gave the NKVD quotas to meet, just like the targets of the Five-Year Plans. If the quotas were not met, the local NKVD officers were expected to add their own names to the lists.
- The use of terror accompanied Stalin's policies and was an essential part of them. The rapid process of collectivisation required the kulaks and those peasants who opposed the policy to be swept away. The unrealistic demands of the Five-Year Plans put enormous pressure on officials to explain a failure to meet targets. It was often essential, for their own personal survival, for managers to label people as saboteurs or shirkers.
- Historians such as Ivan Chukhin have suggested that the huge expansion of terror in the 1930s was the result of the demand for slave labour to ensure that the targets of the Five-Year Plans were met. Forced labour played a key part in Stalin's desire to build prestige projects. It was perhaps no coincidence that some of the Soviet Union's top geologists were arrested on the eve of a camp being set up to exploit oil reserves in the Komi Republic.
- Stalin set the parameters for the purges. The death of Kirov, whether Stalin was directly responsible or not, was used to start the Great Purge of the Party, and the dismissal of Yezhov in 1938 was the signal that the purges were to be slowed down. The death of Stalin resulted in the dismantling of the Gulag system and a reduction in the use of terror.
- Many aspects of the terror reflect Stalin's paranoid personality. The assassination of Kirov in 1934 may well have exacerbated his paranoia. The Doctors' Plot of 1953 seems to have stemmed from Stalin's anti-Semitic views, coupled with suspicions that the Kremlin doctors were trying to kill him.

With so much evidence pointing to Stalin's responsibility for the use of terror, it raises the question of whether Yagoda, Yezhov and Beria were merely functionaries carrying out Stalin's orders or whether they had a role in influencing the development of terror.

- Yagoda, Yezhov and Beria all became powerful leaders of the secret police as a consequence of their willingness to follow Stalin's wishes. All three men had sadistic tendencies and had little, if any, moral conscience about using torture or terror. They owed their positions to Stalin and he dismissed Yagoda and Yezhov. Beria did not survive long after the death of Stalin.
- None of the three had much impact on the targets of the terror. These were decided by Stalin and stemmed from the requirements of his policies and personality. Yet all three took the opportunity to add to the death lists the names of those who stood in their way. Yagoda used his influence to enhance his career within the NKVD, Yezhov advanced his career by undermining Yagoda, and Beria in turn did the same to Yezhov.
- Where the leaders of the NKVD did have influence was in the implementation of terror and the operation of the Gulag. Under Yagoda, the Gulag expanded greatly but struggled to cope with the vast increase in inmates resulting from collectivisation.

Under Yezhov, the process of terror was speeded up, partly in response to the sheer scale of the task. Excessive use of terror was partly driven by the sadistic and frenetic personality of Yezhov himself. The result was that terror became all-pervasive in Soviet society. Beria oversaw a change in the Gulag to a greater emphasis on productivity, which made the system less cruel if no more humane.

Stalin enjoyed making others out to be his 'bad men'; he once introduced Beria to the US President Roosevelt as 'our Himmler', a reference to Hitler's head of the SS. It was a joke that embarrassed the US president. Where power really lay is perhaps best summed up by historian Anne Applebaum (2003) who stated: 'Stalin selected the victims – and his subordinates leaped at the opportunity to obey him.'

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

The use of the secret police under Stalin

1 Who were the main targets of terror during the period 1929 to 1953?

2 How did the methods of terror change during the period 1929 to 1953?

3 Who do you think should bear the most responsibility for the use of terror: Stalin, Yagoda, Yezhov or Beria? Justify your decision.

EXTEND YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Was the use of terror necessary?

Terror was a dominant feature of Stalin's economic transformation of the Soviet Union in the 1930s. The British economist and historian, Alex Nove, caused controversy in 1962 when he suggested that terror was a necessary part of this transformation. His views were put forward in his article 'Was Stalinism Necessary?' While not condoning the use of terror, he saw terror as a product of the time and circumstances within which Stalin had to operate. If a minority group like the Bolsheviks wanted to bring about rapid change, then terror was the only way this could be achieved. Persuasion through concessions and propaganda might have worked, but their use would have made the process of change much slower and, with the growing likelihood of invasion from Germany, this was not an option. Thus, terror was an integral part of Stalin's policies of industrialisation.

More recent studies have developed the economic aspect of the use of terror. James Harris (1997) has argued that the use of terror and the expansion of the Gulag after 1928 were consequences of the pressure exerted by the government on local Party officials and managers to meet targets for economic performance. Forced labour was used as one way of trying to ensure production increased at a time when there were labour shortages. Stalin's own recognition of the role of slave labour in boosting production is highlighted by his diversion of workers to pet projects such as the White Sea Canal. Stalin supported the methods used by Naftaly Frenkel, who applied 'rational' methods to exploit slave labour involving the distribution of food based on a prisoner's capacity to work and the elimination of 'useless extras'. Terror was also used to ensure scientists, technicians and engineers were arrested and sent to camps where their skills were needed. The economic function of the Gulag became particularly pronounced during Beria's period as head of the secret police.

However, it would be misleading to take this interpretation too far. The secret police often declared amnesties for political prisoners, often to relieve overcrowding in the camps. Even as late as 1937, there were some political prisoners who were forbidden to work. Stalin may have wanted prisoners to be put to economic use, but this does not seem to have been the prime reason for arrests. Among the prisoners were many women, children and elderly people who were of limited use for the heavy manual work of most camps. The Gulag was a chaotic and inefficient organisation that struggled with the demands placed upon it, with camp commanders unprepared for each new wave of arrests.

After Stalin's death, the pace and extent of change was much reduced. Khrushchev did not need, nor had he the desire, to use terror to control the Soviet people. The Party's hold on power was now secure and it could rely on the other methods of control that it had at its disposal, such as propaganda and welfare provision.

SOURCE 5 Taken from a secret paper issued by the Central Committee in July 1936. It was probably written by Yezhov.

Now it has been proved that the Trotskyite-Zinovievite monsters unite against the Soviet state all the most hostile and accursed enemies of the toilers of our country – the spies, provocateurs, diversionists, White Guardists, kulaks, etc. ... the inalienable quality of every Bolshevik under present conditions should be the ability to recognize an enemy of the party, no matter how well he may be masked.

SOURCE 6 Taken from an interview with Vyacheslav Molotov, one of Stalin's most loyal members of the Politburo. The interview was conducted by Felix Chuev in 1973 and published in *Molotov Remembers* by Ivan R. Dee in 1993.

[Y]ezhov was a prerevolutionary Bolshevik, a former industrial worker... He worked in the Central Committee for quite some time... He enjoyed a very good reputation, but I can't rule out the possibility that he became somewhat demoralized and corrupt. I still retain some impressions of him...

You could say he overreached himself and committed all kinds of follies. When a man is afraid of losing his job and turns overzealous... that is called careerism. It is tremendously important because it keeps growing and is one of the main defects of our time...

[Y]ezhov had sunk to a point of degeneration... They started to accuse [Y]ezhov when he began to set arrest quotas by regions, on down to districts. No fewer than two thousand must be liquidated in such and such a region... That's the reason he was shot.

THINKING HISTORICALLY Evidence (4a&b)

The weight of evidence

Read Sources 5 and 6. These sources could be used by the historian to build up a picture of the role of the secret police under Yezhov.

Answer the following.

1 Explain why Sources 5 and 6 offer two views of the role of the secret police under Yezhov. How might this affect their value as pieces of evidence in appraising the attitudes towards the secret police under Yezhov in the 1930s? Explain your answer.

Discuss the following in groups.

2 Suppose the historian had ten more accounts that agreed broadly with Source 5 and only four that agreed with Source 6. What would that tell them about the event?

3 How far should the balance of the evidence play a role in constructing written history? What else must the historian consider about the evidence being used before drawing conclusions?

Andropov's suppression of dissidents, 1967–82

After Stalin's death, the use of terror declined considerably, even if the fear that it engendered did not. Surveillance of perceived enemies continued. From 1953, this was the work of the KGB. In 1967, the organisation was headed by Yuri Andropov.

Who were the dissidents?

One of the most important changes that developed under the KGB was that, in the words of poet Anna Akhmatova, people were no longer arrested 'for nothing'; now they were at least arrested 'for something'. The main targets of police action were the dissidents. This term was applied to those who criticised the Soviet state or system and included a diverse range of people.

- **Intellectuals**, whose high status in society had encouraged them to develop independent ways of thinking, constantly came up against restrictions, usually of a political nature. They were also expected to participate in politics if they wanted promotion. One of the most famous examples was Andrei Sakharov, the nuclear scientist. Science was a field where the exchange of ideas with foreign colleagues, reading foreign research papers and using foreign equipment was important. All of these activities were restricted. In frustration, Sakharov and other leading scientists wrote a letter to Brezhnev in 1970, detailing their irritations with the system. The authorities banned him from further military research. Writers, such as historian Roy Medvedev and his brother Zhores (a scientist) and novelist Alexander Solzhenitsyn, complained about the restrictions on their freedom as professionals. They also found their ability to work and travel restricted by the government.
- **Political dissidents** were people who tried to hold the government to the account of its own laws. These groups were usually concerned with abuses of human rights that broke Soviet law and international agreements signed by the USSR. Groups were established to monitor the Soviet Union's application of the **UN Declaration on Human Rights** signed in 1948 and the **Helsinki Accords** of 1975.
- **Nationalists** were often vocal dissidents. Groups of Ukrainians, Latvians, Lithuanians and Georgians existed that called for greater status for their own national languages and cultures; some for independence from the USSR. A growing awareness by Ukrainians of their own culture caused alarm to the authorities, who tried to ban celebrations of the 150th anniversary of the Ukrainian poet, Taras Shevchenko, in 1964. At the same time, a mysterious fire destroyed the Ukrainian archive at the Academy of Sciences in Kiev. The police arrested 20 leading nationalists in an attempt to deter further displays of dissent. Alarm was caused in 1974 when four Lithuanian groups joined together to form a National Popular Front, calling for Lithuanian to be the recognised language of their republic and calling for an end to Soviet colonisation. Further arrests followed. These nationalist groups often received encouragement from their compatriots abroad.

KEY TERMS

UN Declaration on Human Rights, 1948
This committed all member states to promote human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, including freedom of speech and religion. The USSR did not support the Declaration, but it was a member of the UN.

Helsinki Accords, 1975
An agreement to respect basic human rights, such as freedom of speech and freedom of movement. The USSR signed up to this agreement.

- **Religious dissidents** included Baptists and Catholics, who both faced restrictions on their worship and religious practices. Catholic dissidents were often prominent in the Baltic republics, such as Lithuania.
- One of the most prominent groups was that of the ***refuseniks***, Soviet Jews who had been denied their wish to emigrate to Israel. This group had strong support in the US Congress and remained a difficult issue at international summits between the leaders of the USA and the USSR.

Despite the different strands of the dissidents, they all shared a concern with human rights and freedom of expression. Many of the dissidents were themselves communists who wanted the system to work better for them. Their actions were often limited to producing material that shared their concerns and criticisms of the Soviet system. These illegal, self-published materials, often little more than handwritten notes, were known as *samizdat* and their production became a popular hobby in the late 1960s. They contained poems, handwritten newsletters and transcripts of Voice of America radio broadcasts. One of the most well-known of the *samizdat* materials was the 'Chronicle of Current Events', an underground newsletter that highlighted human rights abuses and the treatment of dissidents.

By the 1970s, the dissidents had become more diverse but also bolder, and they were using a wider range of methods to promote their views, including making use of the foreign press to advance their case.

Actions taken against the dissidents

The secret police would conduct surveillance and harassment of suspected dissidents. Intellectuals were often threatened with expulsion from their professional organisation, they might be denied permission to publish or they might be dismissed from their post. Houses were searched and any material or apparatus that could be used to produce or spread material was confiscated. Arrests might follow, but this group of opponents knew why they had been arrested; they claimed the status of political prisoners of conscience and were therefore separated from criminal prisoners. The label of dissident would also mark them out in civilian life, with discrimination at work, failure to gain a place at university, continued surveillance and harassment. By the mid-1970s, Amnesty International estimated that there were, at most, 10,000 political prisoners, a small but not insignificant number.

A new criminal code in 1960 had abolished night-time interrogations and limited the powers of the KGB. This code was far more liberal than the preceding arrangements, but Article 70 provided the authorities with the useful catch-all powers of dealing with anything considered 'anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda'. In 1966, the trial of Andrei Sinyavsky and Yuli Daniel, two dissident writers, had revealed difficulties applying this new code because of the necessity of proving *intent* when accusing someone of anti-Soviet activity. As a result, new articles were added to the criminal code in 1966 that dropped this requirement. Nonetheless, those now arrested had to be dealt with by a court of justice. Court records of proceedings were kept, a significant development that allowed dissident groups to publicise their cases.

One important development in the treatment of dissidents was the use of psychiatric hospitals. In 1967, the Politburo agreed that the leading dissident, Vladimir Bukovsky, should be placed in a 'special mental hospital'. This action, which quickly became a common method of dealing with leading dissidents, had the advantage that it discredited the dissidents in the eyes of the Soviet public. These special 'hospitals' were run by the NKVD and 'patients' were held until they were 'cured', which usually meant they agreed to change their views and opinions of the Soviet state. Those patients who refused were 'treated' with electric shocks and drugs. Zhores Medvedev, a writer and scientist, was diagnosed with 'sluggish schizophrenia' and sent for treatment; so was Natalya Gorbanevskaya, one of the editors of the 'Chronicle of Current Events'. Conditions in these hospitals were overcrowded and unhygienic and did little to improve the international reputation of the USSR.

Another method used to limit the impact of dissidents was to send them into internal exile. Troublesome academics were sent to out-of-the way places, a fact that accounted for the excellent academic work at the Siberian division of the Academy of Sciences. In 1980, Sakharov was sent to Gorky, a city closed to foreigners. This severely restricted his means of communication with supporters. For those who continued to write works critical of the regime, expulsion from the USSR remained an option for the government, as befell Solzhenitsyn in 1974.

The impact of the dissidents

Records of court cases were smuggled out of the USSR and used by human rights groups in the West. The bad publicity this generated was a constant source of irritation to the Soviet government. The Soviet leadership had become increasingly concerned with its international reputation, especially in the light of the Helsinki Accords signed in 1975. The 33 countries that signed the Accords had agreed to respect 'freedom of thought, conscience and belief'. The treatment of dissidents was highlighted by human rights groups as a violation of this agreement. In the age of growing mass communication on a worldwide scale, news of the arrest of a prominent dissident could embarrass a Soviet leader and damage Soviet diplomacy. International condemnation sometimes led to the release of dissidents.

Within the USSR the dissidents had little support from the general public and, despite government fears, they never threatened the social or political stability of the country. The dissidents were a collection of individuals and never a coherent group, let alone a movement. They struggled to organise public demonstrations and, when they did, it revealed their limited support. In 1968, dissidents organised a public protest at the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in Red Square, Moscow. Only seven people turned up. Fear of the secret police played a part in preventing more people joining the protest.

By the end of the 1970s, Andropov's measures had succeeded in keeping the dissident groups small and divided and in a state of mutual mistrust. Methods of dealing with opposition had changed considerably from the terror and torture of Stalin's years. Andropov's methods were more subtle and, with developments in surveillance technology such as electronic bugging devices, they were becoming more sophisticated. The professionalism, reputation and status of the KGB grew considerably under Andropov's leadership.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

Dealing with the dissidents

How effective were the regime's methods of dealing with the dissidents?

The continued monitoring of popular discontent, 1982–85

When Andropov became General Secretary of the Communist Party in 1982, he was already experienced at dealing with popular discontent through his actions as head of the KGB. Andropov had served as Soviet Ambassador to Hungary during the Hungarian Uprising of 1956. This experience had convinced him that dissident action could easily turn into a popular uprising that might threaten the state. Other Politburo leaders were far less convinced but, as General Secretary, Andropov's perception was to influence government actions.

Andropov's monitoring of the dissident groups was increased in 1982 and members of the 'Chronicle of Current Events' recall this period as being one of the most difficult in which to operate. The stereotypical image of plain-clothes secret police officers in long leather coats, following people in the streets, had some basis in fact, but methods of monitoring were becoming more sophisticated as a result of new technology. Conversations were recorded using tape and cassette recorders and listening devices and cameras were secreted in briefcases and bras. The KGB were well informed of the criticisms of the Soviet system put forward by the dissidents, and their threat to social and political stability had been effectively neutralised.

The situation is summed up in Extract 2.

EXTRACT 2

An assessment of the dissident movement by the historian, Anne Applebaum. From her book, *Gulag*, (published 2003) which examined the developments in the role of the secret police from 1917 to 1986.

> In the middle of the 1980s, Solzhenitsyn was in exile abroad, and Sakharov was in internal exile in the city of Gorky. KGB policemen sat outside Roy Medvedev's door, monitoring all of his movements. No one in the USSR seemed to notice their struggle. Peter Reddaway, probably the leading Western academic specialist on Soviet dissent at the time, wrote in 1983 that dissident groups 'have made little or no headway among the mass of ordinary people in the Russian heartland'.

Andropov was, however, well aware that the dissidents did not represent the majority of the Soviet population and he realised that popular discontent was more likely to be based on economic concerns. He was greatly concerned with the growing inefficiency in the Soviet economy and believed that if the Soviet government did not deliver a reasonable standard of living the discontent was likely to spread. The communist government in Poland had faced serious popular unrest in 1980–81 sparked by a decision to raise food prices. Andropov was therefore aware that economic issues could threaten instability in the USSR. As Andropov told his doctor, 'We'll make enough sausages, and then we won't have any dissidents.'

The government's attempt to bring greater efficiency to the Soviet economic system highlighted popular concerns. Andropov used the secret police to clamp down on alcoholism and absenteeism in the workplace. KGB officers did spot checks on factories to record attendance and combed the streets for truanting workers. Unfortunately, this tactic upset many female workers who had to juggle a full-time job with queuing for food at shops. The queues were partly a result of cheap government-set prices, which meant that goods sold out quickly after arrival in the shops. Being in the right queue at the right time was an important part of a Soviet mother's daily life. What Andropov's actions revealed was that the general public preferred queuing to higher food prices.

Andropov recognised that economic reform was needed and that the Party leadership was made up largely of old men who had become out of touch with the concerns of the general population. This led Andropov to tell the Politburo that the leadership needed 'to acquire an understanding of the society in which we live'. This was a remarkably different approach to that of previous Soviet leaders.

- Andropov took the lead by visiting factories to talk to workers. In February 1983, he visited a Moscow factory, but the whole event was rather contrived. Andropov was well-meaning and genuine in his desire to listen to the views of the public, but he was humourless, austere and lacked charm. Workers who met him felt restricted by the fact that they were talking to the ex-head of the KGB.
- A more effective method of tapping into public concerns was the appointment of new government advisers. Andropov surrounded himself with people who were relatively free thinkers, more often journalists or academics, who were in touch with the causes of popular discontent. He made particular use of a group of sociologists and economists from Novosibirsk, especially Tatyana Zaslavskaya, who argued that the arbitrary nature of much of Soviet administration was a key cause of resentment.
- Within the Party leadership, Andropov made a conscious effort to promote a younger, more reformist generation, whose experience in the lower ranks of the Party meant they were more in touch with the realities of daily life in the Soviet Union. Among those promoted were Mikhail Gorbachev, Yegor Ligachev and Nikolai Ryzhkov, all of whom would later play key roles in attempting to reform the Soviet Union.

Andropov's methods of monitoring popular discontent showed a greater desire to meet the needs of the general population and reinforced his belief that reform was needed. Where the methods stalled was in the development of firm action to address these public concerns. To Andropov, the answer was to instil greater discipline in the workforce to make the existing system work better. Ill health seriously hampered Andropov's ability to introduce more wide-ranging reform, even if he had wanted to.

Despite the failure of the government to address those issues that irritated the Soviet population, it would be wrong to view the Soviet Union in the mid-1980s as socially unstable. There was little public criticism of the government and social conflict was rare. A well-worked system of propaganda, censorship, rewards and sanctions was highly effective, but this should not necessarily be taken to mean that the Soviet public was happy. Grumbling was a popular Soviet pastime.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

The continued monitoring of popular discontent, 1982–85

1 How did the Soviet government attempt to monitor popular discontent between 1982 and 1985?

2 Do you think the government was in touch with popular opinion during this period?

a) How had methods of terror and intimidation used by the Soviet government changed between 1928 and 1985?

b) What do you think were the main causes of these changes?

THINKING HISTORICALLY Change (5a)

The strands of complex change

Changes leading up to Andropov's clampdown on dissident activity in 1982.

Strands	Explanation of how the strand links to Andropov's clampdown on dissident activity in 1982
The increasing confidence of the people in testing the limits of government restrictions.	Decline in the regime's use of terror as a result of de-Stalinisation (1956) encouraged greater experimentation in the arts and a wider range of views was expressed. Development of the 'derevenshchiki' school (1970s onwards), 'Russites' (1970s onwards). Helsinki Accords (1975) encourage dissident activity. Leading writers embarrass the regime: Solzhenitsyn expelled from USSR (1974). Pasternak wins Nobel Prize in 1958. Large numbers of people commemorate the guitar-poet, Vladimir Vysotsky, at his funeral (1980). 'Chronicle of Current Events' established (1968). Number of 'Samizdat' publications increases (1970s).
The growing influence of cultural trends from the West on Soviet society.	Impact of rock and roll (1955 onwards), disco and punk (late 1970s/early 1980s). Growth of the guitar-poet (1960s onwards). Development of the cassette recorder and illegal 'magnitizdat' recording (late 1970s onwards).
The actions and influence of the KGB.	Increased use of electronic devices for listening to the population (from 1970s). Increased use of informers and Komsomol activists (1970s). Andropov becomes head of the KGB (1967). Unrest in Czechoslovakia (1968) shows danger of allowing too much liberalisation. Unrest in Poland (1981) confirms importance of need to keep dissidents under control.

Make two copies of the graph below. On the first plot the individual strands against the *y* axis. Use a different colour for each. You do not need to label it with the events. On the second graph plot a single line that is a combination of all three strands. (For example, at a given point two of the three strands are plotted high up on the *y* axis while two are plotted lower down. The combined strand would have to be plotted somewhere in the middle to represent a summary of those three individual strands.)



1 How have the strands combined to make change less or more likely?

2 Why did the clampdown on dissident activity happen in 1982, but not before?

AS Level Exam-Style Question Section B

How far was Beria responsible for enlarging the role of the secret police in the years 1938–53? (20 marks)

Tip

Think about how the secret police grew between 1938 and 1953 and the reasons behind this. 'How far' requires you to weigh up the role of Beria in this expansion. Was it also due to Stalin's changing policies? What role did the Second World War play in this process? Do not lose focus on Beria. How did he respond to the demands placed on the secret police?

A Level Exam-Style Question Section B

How far did the role of the secret police change in the Soviet Union through the period 1953–85? (20 marks)

Tip

This question requires careful explanation of how the role of the secret police changed. The instruction 'how far' requires you to look at continuity as well as change. You should examine the role by looking at the aims, status, methods and effectiveness of the secret police.

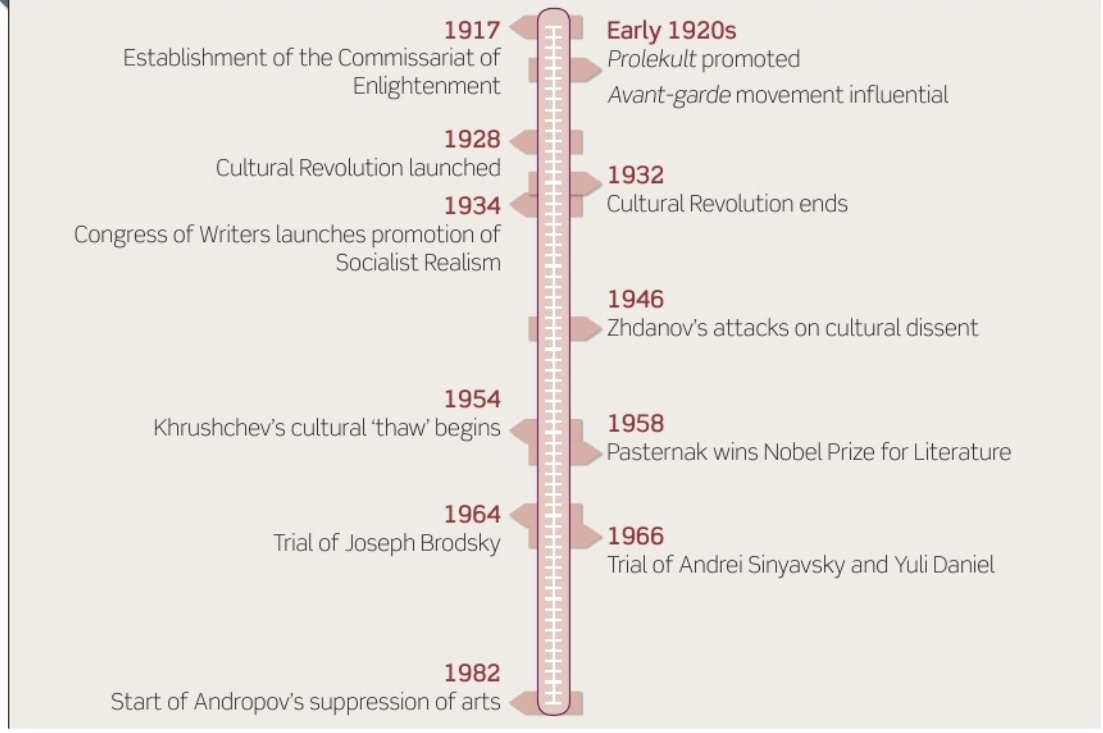
HOW EFFECTIVE WAS THE SOVIET GOVERNMENT'S USE OF CULTURE AND THE ARTS?

KEY TERM

New Soviet man
An ideal socialist who thinks and acts according to socialist values.

The Soviet regime recognised that embedding the values and beliefs of communism in the Soviet population would require more than propaganda and terror. The government's aim of creating a '**new Soviet man**' would entail using artists and writers to construct a whole new culture that would sweep away the old bourgeois culture associated with the Tsarist regime. Although Lenin was rather slow to see the potential of moulding culture to serve the ideology of communism, after the civil war the Communists started to harness culture for their own purposes. In the 1930s, Stalin's regime made a concerted effort to create a new culture based on promoting idealised images of life under socialism. From this point onwards artists and writers were expected to promote the values of the regime. Not all artists and writers were prepared to work within these restrictions and many were opposed to the demands placed upon them. By the 1970s, Soviet culture had developed its own distinct ethos, but those to whom the regime looked in order to propagate this culture were often those most likely to clash with its desire for conformity.

TIMELINE OF CULTURAL POLICY



Prolekult, avant-garde and Socialist Realism, 1917–53

Russia had a long and distinguished cultural tradition before 1917, although its role in society was limited to a small section of the educated elite. The Bolsheviks, while not seeing culture as a priority in 1917, did have some ideas about how it could be used for political advantage. The new political environment of the Revolution had produced a range of pressures, from radical experimentation with new ideas to more conservative tastes, which were often pushing in different directions.

Bolshevik attitudes towards the arts and popular culture

In 1917, the Bolshevik Party was divided over the importance and direction of cultural policy. According to Lenin, culture was vital but subordinate to class conflict and the retention of power. Lenin's cultural tastes were conservative, with a liking for classical Russian culture. He wanted the Party to keep high-calibre writers and artists on side as much as possible. One important development Lenin implemented early after the seizure of power was to create a Commissariat of Enlightenment, a ministry of culture, to support and encourage artists. This was a development welcomed by artists as it replaced the heavy restrictions and censorship of the old regime.

This encouraged many artists to work with the new regime. Lenin seemed prepared to accommodate those artists who were not communists but who were sympathetic to the ideals of the Revolution and who found plenty of material for their work in the events of the period. These artists were labelled by Trotsky as Fellow Travellers. Not all Bolsheviks were happy with this approach.

Prolekult

A second strand of cultural policy was promoted by Alexander Bogdanov, a leading figure in the Party, and Anatoly Lunacharsky, the head of the Commissariat of Enlightenment. Bogdanov argued that the state needed to use new technology to create its own 'Proletarian Culture' or *prolekult*. He felt that a new group of proletarian artists should be assembled, for whom art was to serve a social and political purpose. A key strand of this group became known as **Constructivists,** aiming to create a new socialist culture. The emphasis was to be on the collective of the workers as a class, rather than individualism. Workers and peasants were encouraged to produce their own culture, from writing their own stories to putting on theatre productions. The magazine *Smithy* was established, which contained poems about machines and factories. The government also made use of festivals to develop a new culture based on socialist values, and extra food rations were sometimes used as an incentive for crowds to turn up. The anniversary of the Revolution in 1920 was celebrated by a re-enactment of the storming of the Winter Palace using over 8,000 people. Parades through Red Square in Moscow were organised and directed by the Party to the extent that they were examples of street theatre. Thus, the achievements of the workers, and the Party that ruled in their name, were reinforced through the arts.

Prolekult was a deliberate direct challenge to **high culture** and it became popular for a time, but by the early 1920s the government was concerned at the variety of viewpoints expressed through this culture from the people and started to impose restrictions on it.

KEY TERMS

Constructivists
Those who wished to create a new proletarian culture based on the worker and industrial technology.

High culture
This is used to refer to those art forms, such as ballet, opera and fine art, that are geared towards a restricted and exclusive audience. The Bolsheviks disliked 'high' culture, as opposed to 'low' culture, seeing it as 'bourgeois' art.

Avant-garde

In many branches of cultural activity, traditional assumptions and practices related to the purpose, subjects and style of art were challenged. This was as much a result of the First World War sweeping away the old world as it was of the new government, and it led to a wave of experimentation that has been termed *avant-garde*.

In art, the influence of Modernism, with its emphasis on abstract art, was coupled with that of Futurism as artists attempted to convey visions of a new futuristic world.

In poster art, the Bolshevik regime was to acquire the services of the talented poet and playwright, V. Mayakovsky, who set to work producing slogans and posters for the government. His work may have been propaganda, but it was genuinely innovative. In painting and sculpture, K. Malevich and V. Kandinsky represent examples of 'Fellow Travellers' who produced a large output of experimental work in the early 1920s. It is not surprising that, in a country where literacy rates were low, the Bolsheviks put so much stress on visual arts. The influence of the Futurists on science fiction did, however, have an impact on popular reading. New trends in popular music saw the first appearance of jazz in Russia, to mixed reviews.

In the theatre, the *avant-garde* movement was led by Vyacheslav Meyerhold, who produced the pageant *Mystery Bouffe* (1918). It was a fantasy based on the workers defeating their exploiters, but was so confusing to audiences that it was cancelled after one performance.

As a relatively new development, the cinema was especially open to experimentation and, in Sergei Eisenstein, the regime found one of the foremost innovators in the new medium. Eisenstein had already made *Strike* by 1924 and *Battleship Potemkin* was in production, to be released in 1925. The experimental use of imagery made Eisenstein's work truly innovative. Lenin had stated the importance of cinema as a tool for promoting political messages, but it was sometimes too sophisticated for the audience. If culture was to mould people's beliefs and values, the *avant-garde* movement was not the answer.

The Cultural Revolution

The greater freedom in the arts that had been tolerated under Lenin was to come under growing criticism in the late 1920s. Caught up in the pressures that led to the Five-Year Plan and collectivisation, the **Cultural Revolution** became part of the attempt to sweep away the old 'bourgeois' elements within society. This entailed a full-scale assault on traditional writers and artists. Those Fellow Travellers tolerated under Lenin were to be removed and replaced by artists whose loyalty to socialism was not in question.

Young enthusiastic communists from **Komsomol** were encouraged to root out and attack 'bourgeois' elements. Theatre productions of suspect plays were disrupted by booing and whistling. In literature, the Russian Association of Proletarian Writers (RAPP) made increasingly bitter attacks on the Fellow Travellers and condemned the decadent individualism of writers who adopted new experimental techniques. Influenced by the ideas of the *prolekult* movement, RAPP preferred works that stressed the achievements of the workers, in what became termed the **cult of the 'little man'**.

KEY TERMS

Cultural Revolution
The movement by Communist Party activists to purge all 'bourgeois' elements from Soviet culture.

Komsomol
The youth organisation of the Communist Party.

Cult of the 'little man'
The writing of novels that glorified the achievements of the industrial worker and collective peasant. It was encouraged by the government and was a criticism of 'bourgeois' writing, which often focused on wealthy people of high status.

Kataev's novel *Time Forward* (1932) was a good example of this. It recounted the story of a record-breaking shift at Magnitogorsk steelworks. This sort of theme, often described as 'boy meets girl meets tractor', tied in with the Five-Year Plans, but it soon lost its popularity as similar themes were endlessly repeated. Yet RAPP did its best to encourage cultural activities in factories, such as reading and drama groups, with some success.

Socialist Realism

In 1932, the Party leadership announced that RAPP would be closed down and replaced by a new Union of Soviet Writers. This was, in effect, bringing the Cultural Revolution to an end. Stalin recognised the importance of writers and artists, calling them 'engineers of human souls'. They were now put to use in pursuit of Socialist Realism. This term was used to describe art that presented idealised images of life under socialism to inspire the population towards its achievement. Socialist Realism was used to convince the Soviet population that Stalin's statement of 1935, 'Life has become more joyous', was true. The Union of Soviet Writers was to police the movement, rewarding those who complied and restricting those who did not. Some writers, such as Mikhail Zoshchenko, conformed to the rules but the quality of their work suffered; others refused to work under such restrictions and emigrated. The novelist, Boris Pasternak, and the poet, Anna Akhamatova, gave up writing, opting for what the writer, Isaac Babel, called 'the genre of silence'. However, Pasternak's novels were smuggled abroad and published. Mayakovsky, who had become disillusioned with the Party, committed suicide; others met their deaths in the labour camps.

- **Art** Under Socialist Realism there was to be no experimentation with form: *avant-garde* styles, such as abstract art, were rejected. Art was harnessed by the regime to project ideal images of life under the Five-Year Plans, often presented through images of the worker and peasant working for socialism. Stalin had told artists that they should make it clear who was responsible for the achievements of socialism. This often resulted in a fusion of Socialist Realism with the cult of personality, as vast statues of Stalin started to appear.
- **Literature** saw a change of emphasis away from the cult of the 'little man' to heroes connected to the Party. The standard plot of novels in the 1930s was of a hero from the people who is guided by the Party to greater things. This theme was developed in much of the 'high' literature through works by Mikhail Sholokhov (such as *And Quiet Flows the Don*) and Maxim Gorky, and had much in common with traditional Russian folk stories. 'Lowbrow' literature was usually concerned with heroes from Russian history, war stories or detective novels where a police agent thwarts the evil capitalists. The low price of these books and the tenfold growth in library acquisitions ensured the population had easy access to this material. Through government agencies, the Party controlled what was published and by whom.

SOURCE 7 An example of Socialist Realism: a vast sculpture celebrating the worker and peasant. Created for the 1937 Paris Expo by Vera Mukhina.



EXTEND YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Anna Akhmatova (1889–1966)

Considered to be one of the greatest poets in Russian history. She produced high-quality work in the 1920s, but much of her work was banned by Stalin for failing to promote communist policy. She gave up writing for publication in the 1930s. After Stalin's death, her poetry was once again published. Later published works included *Requiem*, which chose as its subject her suffering during the purges. Her husband was shot during Stalin's terror and her son was imprisoned during the purges. She later became a dissident and continued to criticise the Soviet government until her death in 1966. Her refusal to emigrate was also a cause of irritation to the government.

- **Music** also suffered from a pressure to toe the line. In 1935, Stalin walked out of a performance of Shostakovich's opera *Lady Macbeth of Mstensk* (a politically correct story of adultery) due to discordant notes. The real reason was Stalin's shock at the bedroom scene, where trombones were used to underline what was happening. In popular music, the government favoured military songs more than jazz. Government concern over the perceived decadent associations of jazz led to the banning of the saxophone in the 1940s. As in literature, it was better to stick to well-worn themes than experiment if you wished to carry on working.
- **Architecture** Socialist Realism promoted the style known as 'Stalinist baroque', better known as 'wedding cake' architecture, which made use of classical lines. Many public buildings were built in this style, the best example being Moscow University, which was rebuilt after 1945. The Moscow metro system was another fine example of Stalinist baroque, with stations decorated with chandeliers and elaborate murals, showing the endeavours of the workers.
- **Film** The achievements of the Revolution were conveyed through films, such as Eisenstein's *October* (1927), which presented the heroic version of the storming of the Winter Palace in 1917. This served the interests of the government in presenting the Revolution as a mass movement. Unfortunately, due to Eisenstein's excessive use of extras and live ammunition, more people died in the making of the film than in the actual events themselves. During the Second World War, the cinema was used to promote patriotism in defence of both Mother Russia and socialism: the film *Alexander Nevsky* was one of the most popular.

The focus of Socialist Realism on accessible art and popular culture provided a useful tool for government propaganda. Socialist Realism, rooted in 'the people', resulted in formalised but accessible styles in art and writing. It is easy to criticise Socialist Realism for being so out of touch with reality, but the work of social historians such as R. Stites has drawn attention to the range of purposes the arts and culture could have. Socialist Realism presented images that some committed Party members were willing to believe and others were prepared to use to inspire them to work harder. Other sections of the population, while not believing them, may have found the images to be a satisfying method of escapism. It was rather more than art for art's sake. This range of functions gave the government many opportunities to use the arts and popular culture to mobilise support at a range of levels for the regime.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

***Prolekult, avant-garde* and Socialist Realism, 1917–53**

Look at the examples of art shown in Sources 1 and 7. Explain how the Soviet government would have viewed each of these works when they were made.

Nonconformity from the 1950s

Culture during Stalin's last years

The last years of Stalin's leadership saw some changes of emphasis in cultural policy. Immediately after the Second World War there were signs that the government was prepared to allow artists and writers greater freedom. Both Boris Pasternak and Anna Akhmatova were allowed to give public readings of their unorthodox poetry in Moscow in 1946 to enthusiastic applause. The signs of greater freedom were quickly dispelled as elements of Western culture were condemned in a campaign referred to as the Zhdanovschina. Zhdanov was the Party boss in Leningrad and he had a particular interest in culture. In 1946, a campaign was launched to remove all aspects of 'bourgeois' culture from the West. It was heavily influenced by xenophobic attitudes that had been enhanced by the development of the Cold War. The classical composer, Dmitri Shostakovich, was subjected to the humiliation of being called into Zhdanov's office to have suitable tunes tapped out to him on a piano by Zhdanov himself. Zhdanov told Shostakovich that there was little point in composing music you could not hum. Shostakovich thereafter restricted himself to writing film scores.

The impact of de-Stalinisation on culture

Those artists and writers who wished to express themselves freely were to receive greater hope from Khrushchev's policy of de-Stalinisation after 1957. Not all of these hopes were fulfilled. In line with the criticism of Stalin and his 'errors', Khrushchev allowed works to be published that had been previously banned.

- Works by Isaac Babel, a writer who had been shot during the purges, were published.
- Younger poets, such as Yevgeny Yevtushenko and Andrei Voznesenski, were allowed to publish collections of more experimental poetry, and jazz music made a reappearance.
- Khrushchev's personal intervention led to the publication of the previously banned book by Solzhenitsyn, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, which recounted the appalling experiences of life in the Gulag. Further novels by Solzhenitsyn followed that attacked aspects of Stalin's terror and fitted in with the new political emphasis of de-Stalinisation. Where works did not fall so easily into the political context, however, writers could still come up against restrictions.

Other voices spoke out against the official culture. Sholokhov went as far as to openly describe official Soviet culture as 'grey trash'. Writers began to explore new themes such as spiritual concerns, the bleakness of rural life and the problems of adultery, divorce and alcohol abuse. This 'literature of conscience' did not focus on the idealised life portrayed by Socialist Realism. Even 'low-brow' literature was used to criticise the Soviet system. Science-fiction novels often contained messages that acted as critiques of society.

By the late 1950s, nonconformity was starting to have an important impact on youth culture in the USSR. Tired with the repetitive and unexciting themes of official cultural output, Soviet youth became influenced by music tastes from the West. Urban groups developed that listened to the pop and rock'n'roll music emerging in the West, the records having been smuggled into the country. These groups, wearing Western fashions of tight suits and short skirts, were labelled *stilyagi* by the authorities, who described them as rude and ignorant freaks. From 1955, this music was broadcast into the USSR by the radio station Voice of America.

One notable development in popular music was that of the guitar-poet. Its leading figure was Alexander Galich, who composed and performed his own work rather than performing officially sanctioned pieces produced by the government. The guitar-poet typically addressed the feelings of the individual and often spoke to the socially alienated. Audiences at underground venues were small, but through the use of the tape recorder their work could be spread to a wider audience. *Magnitizdat*, or tape recorder self-publishing, was a constant headache for the authorities.

Nonconformity during the Brezhnev years

The replacement of Khrushchev with Brezhnev in 1964 did not see a return to the strict application of Socialist Realism of Stalin's years, but it did narrow the boundaries of what was acceptable after the cultural thaw of the Khrushchev years. Many artists and writers found the new cultural climate easier to work in as there was more certainty over what was permissible but, nonetheless, continued to push the boundaries of what was acceptable.

Official culture continued to focus on propaganda and the achievements of socialism and the Soviet state, providing stirring themes for the population. The majority of the population preferred this style even if many artists and writers found it undemanding. To those wishing to stretch themselves creatively, this was, in the words of historian Richard Stites 'the graveyard of ideas, openness and free expression'.

Aspects of nonconformity include the following.

- By the 1970s, Soviet culture had become conservative, and artists and writers were more likely to get into trouble by touching on sexual themes than political ones.
- The *derevenshchiki* school of village prose highlighted the values of simple rural life. These accounts were often romanticised and featured a longing for a lost world of the past. It caused the government unease because it could be read as a critique of urban life in the Soviet Union.
- Russian nationalism received some encouragement from the government, but writers who took up the theme, the so-called 'Russites', alienated non-Russians and often came close to criticising the Soviet Union.
- The increasing influence of popular music. Soviet youth continued to be drawn towards cultural trends in the West. Vladimir Vysotsky emerged as an influential guitar-poet whose songs of sex and delinquency were popular with young people. His funeral in 1980 saw an outpouring of grief that worried the government. He had not been their idea of a role model for Soviet youth. It seemed to indicate the growing alienation of young people from Soviet society. The elderly men in the Politburo struggled to understand the appeal of rock and disco music, but realised that they could not suppress it. Control was exercised over record production and radio airtime, but undermined by the development of the cassette recorder, which was, by the early 1980s, widely available for personal recording and distribution.

By the early 1980s, nonconformity in the cultural sphere had continued to cause the government irritation. Artists and writers continued to use a range of responses to avoid conforming to the role expected of them by the government. Some chose emigration or were forced into exile, others refused to work. However, the Brezhnev years had made it easier to undermine the system by using subtexts in their work. Readers and audiences became skilful at grasping the messages behind the work.

Clashes between artists and the government to 1985

Although cultural restrictions were lessened after 1953, the boundaries of what was permissible were constantly tested by artists and writers. Nonconformity may no longer have automatically resulted in a prison sentence, but clampdowns by the authorities often produced clashes with the government.

Clashes with Khrushchev

The limits of Khrushchev's cultural thaw were shown by the treatment of Boris Pasternak over his novel *Doctor Zhivago*. The book, which was an epic story set during the Russian Civil War, contained criticisms of the Revolution. Soviet publishers were undecided over whether or not it should be published until Khrushchev intervened and, without reading the full text, decided that the book should be banned. However, the novel was smuggled abroad and an edition first appeared in Italy in 1957.

The reception it gained was extremely positive and, to Khrushchev's embarrassment, Pasternak was awarded the 1958 Nobel Prize for Literature. Khrushchev refused to allow Pasternak to travel to Sweden to receive his prize. The whole affair was a cause of international embarrassment for the Soviet government and Khrushchev later regretted his actions.

Abstract art was another area where nonconformity was not encouraged. It was a pet hate of Khrushchev's, as demonstrated in 1962 when he visited the exhibition hall in the Kremlin to view a collection of work by young artists. On seeing the pieces of art, Khrushchev fumed with rage, proclaiming that 'a donkey could smear better art with its tail'. The artists were harangued in full view of the cameras and left the exhibition in fear of arrest and imprisonment. But change had occurred and, despite Khrushchev's fury, no action was taken against the artists.

SOURCE 8 Khrushchev shows his disapproval when confronted with abstract art at the Manege gallery in Moscow, 1962.



Khrushchev's anger was also aroused by jazz music.

SOURCE 9 Khrushchev speaking at the 1962 Manege exhibition of art, Moscow.

> When I hear jazz it's as if I have gas in my stomach... these new dances which are so fashionable now... You wiggle a certain part of your anatomy... it's indecent.

Komsomol groups were employed to patrol the streets and dance halls to report on young people whose behaviour was deemed unacceptable. In 1961, the government had gone as far as to hold a conference that decided on which dance moves were permissible. Enforcing the decision was a complete failure.

Khrushchev's cultural policy reflected his personality in that it was subject to mood swings. He became less tolerant of nonconformity in his last months as leader and this attitude was entrenched by his successors.

The trial of Joseph Brodsky, 1964

The patience of Brezhnev's government with those writers who wished to test the boundaries of nonconformity was shown by the treatment of Joseph Brodsky. Having dropped out of school at 15, Brodsky decided to write poetry. Encouraged by Anna Akhmatova, his poems were read aloud at secret gatherings. The secret police soon became aware of Brodsky's actions and he was arrested. Brodsky was not licensed as a poet under the Writers' Union. He was accused of 'parasitism' and condemned for the 'depravity' of his poetry. It soon became clear at his trial that the case was being used to send a firm message to all those artists who wished to work independently of the state. Brodsky was dealt with severely and sentenced to five years of hard labour in prison, on the grounds that he had produced nothing of material value to the Soviet state. Yet times had changed and the government had used the legal apparatus of the state against Brodsky. This meant that detailed court records were kept, a copy of which was smuggled abroad. Fellow writers at home and abroad campaigned for Brodsky's release, which was granted after two years. He was then expelled from the Soviet Union. The treatment of Brodsky indicated that, despite the cultural thaw of the Khrushchev years, there were limits to what Brezhnev's government was prepared to tolerate.

The trial of Andrei Sinyavsky and Yuli Daniel, 1966

A further clampdown on cultural nonconformity was signalled by the arrest of the writers Sinyavsky and Daniel in 1965. They had written short novels that depicted life in the Soviet Union as harsh and surreal. Although written under pseudonyms, the writers soon came to the attention of the KGB. They were arrested and accused of anti-Soviet propaganda under Article 70 of the criminal code. The significance of this case was the fact that the allegations against them were based on the actual content of their literary work. Their arrest resulted in a demonstration of over 200 students from Sinyavsky's institute and an open letter of support for the accused signed by 63 leading intellectuals. Over 200 letters were sent to the Twenty-third Party Congress asking for the case to be reviewed. The trial was a tricky moment for the regime as it combined the threat of nonconformity with that of the dissidents. On 10 February 1966, the court sentenced Sinyavsky to seven years in a strict-regime labour camp. Yuli Daniel was sentenced to five years. They were harsh sentences, designed to send a warning to others.

Control and further clampdowns

The government attempted to control and direct cultural output by an extensive system of state subsidies and ensuring access to the radio and venues. Awards and privileges were given to those artists and writers who served the interests of the state. Employment could be withdrawn from troublemakers. Any artists or writers who had strayed too far from what was acceptable were given a talk from a government official to point out their errors and warn them of the consequences. This was often enough to bring artists and writers back into line. For those writers and artists who continued to push the boundaries, the government resorted to more punitive measures. Solzhenitsyn was expelled from the Writers' Union in 1969 and then expelled from the Soviet Union in 1974. He continued to write in exile about the harshness of Soviet life and, although the Soviet government could no longer stop him, his book *The Gulag Archipelago* was condemned for being filthy, anti-Soviet propaganda.

Abstract and experimental art continued to be a source of conflict with the government. In 1970, the local art gallery director at Novosibirsk was sentenced to eight years in prison for displaying art by dissident painters. In 1975, a group of unofficial artists (that is, artists not licensed by the government) put on an open-air exhibition of their own work. Brezhnev's government launched a propaganda campaign against the artists and an 'enraged public' (that is, officially recruited hooligans) attacked the work. The authorities eventually brought in bulldozers to destroy the exhibition. The government had second thoughts after the incident was filmed and reported by the foreign press, and allowed the art to be put back on display providing it could be patched up.

Dealing with subversive elements in popular culture was more difficult due to the underground nature of much of their activity. It was left to Andropov's government of 1982–84 to clamp down on these activities. Recognising that some accommodation with popular music was necessary, the government restricted output of songs not composed by official Soviet composers to 20 percent of radio airtime. A commission was set up to vet all rock groups before they were given permission to perform and Komsomol groups were once again employed to patrol streets and report on unacceptable activity.

Clashes between nonconformist artists and the government were the cause of much bad publicity for the Soviet Union in the West, but these high-profile cases were of less significance within the USSR itself.

Most artists and writers preferred to keep their heads down, conform and avoid trouble with the authorities. More often than not, the general public were happy with the traditional cultural output provided by the government; undemanding art and entertainment was preferred to more intellectually stimulating work. Nonconformist artists were often viewed by the general public as self-indulgent and out of touch with the harsh realities of daily life.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

Nonconformity and clashes with artists, 1953–85

1 What methods did the Soviet government use to control culture and the arts?

2 Does continued nonconformity in the arts through the period indicate government failure to control the Soviet people?

Conclusion

This chapter has looked at key methods by which the Soviet government attempted to control the Soviet people. The heavy use of terror in the Stalin years gave way to a more complex range of methods. Propaganda and control over culture had been used since the establishment of the communist regime in 1917, but became more important as the use of terror lessened. By the 1950s, the government was aware that public consent for the continued rule of the Communist Party depended on the government's ability to deliver better economic conditions and material benefits for the population. Without these, the boasts of Soviet achievement as presented through propaganda would be seen as empty. It is no coincidence that, by the 1970s, the main threat to order and stability was economic hardship rather than calls for political change.

ACTIVITIES
SUMMARY

Control of the people 1917–85

1 Explain how the Soviet government used the following methods to control the Soviet population:

a) propaganda

b) terror

c) control over culture.

2 Explain how the Soviet government's use of these methods changed through the period 1917 to 1985.

3 Which of these methods was the most effective? Explain your answer.

WIDER READING

The following books are particularly useful for the aspects covered in this chapter.

For propaganda:

Eaton, K. *Daily Life in the Soviet Union*, Greenwood (2004)

Suny, R. *The Soviet Experiment*, Oxford (1998)

For terror:

Applebaum, A. *Gulag*, Allen Lane (2003)

Butler, R. *Stalin's Instruments of Terror*, Spellmount (2006)

Sebag Montefiore, S. *Stalin: the Court of the Red Tsar*, Phoenix (2004)

For the arts and culture:

Stites, R. *Russian Popular Culture*, Cambridge (1992)

Thompson, W. *The Soviet Union under Brezhnev*, Pearson (2003)

AS Level Exam-Style Question Section B

How far would you agree that the Soviet government's use of the arts and culture was successful in the period 1917 to 1985? (20 marks)

Tip

Think about evidence you could use to support the argument that the government's use of the arts and culture was successful and evidence that it was not. This will allow you to assess 'how far'. When writing your answer it is important to develop an overall argument and make a clear, reasoned judgement rather than just provide two lists of evidence. Think about the circumstances in which there was success. What was the key factor limiting/explaining success? Try to have precise examples of government policies to support your points.

A Level Exam-Style Question Section B

How far was government control over the Soviet people in the years 1917 to 1985 the result of the use of terror? (20 marks)

Tip

This question requires you to assess the role of terror in the context of other factors. Try to show how the use of terror links to other methods. Did the relative use of each method of control change over time?

1.4 Social developments, 1917–85

KEY QUESTIONS

- How successful was the government in providing social security for the Soviet people between 1917 and 1985?
- To what extent did the role of women and the family change between 1917 and 1985?
- How successful was the Soviet government's attempts to improve the provision of education?

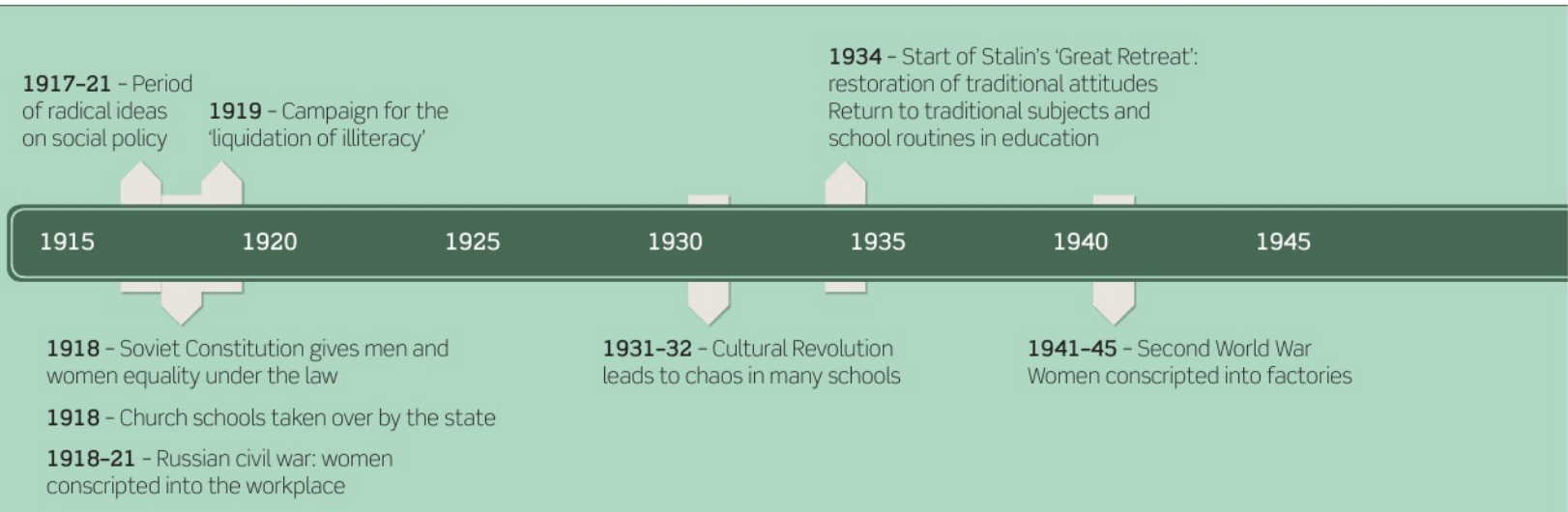
INTRODUCTION

Committed communists thought that the state should take a leading role in bringing about social change. With authority invested in the Party and the state, there was an opportunity to transform society for the good of ordinary working people. This transformation would entail using social policy to provide the population with its basic needs and to change the attitudes and values of society itself. Communist ideology envisaged a society that operated on a collective basis and would therefore mark a break with the individualist approach associated with capitalism. An important branch of Soviet social policy was the provision of social security through the achievement of full employment, and adequate housing and pensions. These measures would ensure that poverty, a feature of capitalist societies, was eradicated. In the pursuit of equality, the status of women was addressed and policies towards the role of the family were used to break down traditional attitudes that limited opportunities for women. Educational provision would be extended to ensure that the potential of the whole population was developed and utilised to its full. For these reasons, social policy was an essential part of the great Soviet experiment.

As well as being agents of social transformation, social policies played a vital role in providing support for the continuance of Communist Party rule. A population whose basic needs are met is much more likely to support the regime that carries responsibility for providing it. In this way, the social policy of the Soviet government was a method of providing social and political stability. After the death of Stalin in 1953, and the reduction in the use of terror to control the people, this method became more important as a factor in buttressing the regime. Stability was enhanced by government promotion of the family as a unit that provided social self-regulation and cohesion. Early attempts to change the nature of the family were abandoned after 1935 in favour of more traditional attitudes. The Communist government was prepared to use the traditional family where it suited its purposes.

The huge expansion of educational provision at all levels allowed the hold of the state to reach most of the population. The growth of education ensured Soviet citizens were better equipped for a modern industrial economy, but also provided opportunities to instil socialist values from a young age. Education was one of the main mechanisms for upward social mobility in the Soviet Union, and a recognition by the population that this provided opportunities for advancement tied many citizens into the Soviet system.

Thus, social policy started with ideas and policies that attempted to bring about radical change, but after 1935 it became, more often than not, a tool of social stability rather than transformation.



HOW SUCCESSFUL WAS THE GOVERNMENT IN PROVIDING SOCIAL SECURITY FOR THE SOVIET PEOPLE BETWEEN 1917 AND 1985?

One of the great attractions of communism was its claim that it would ensure that the people were provided with what they needed. This would be the provision of employment, shelter, food, an education and welfare provision such as health care. This contract was enshrined in the Soviet Constitution of 1977, which stated that all Soviet citizens had the right to work, rest and leisure, health protection, care in old age and sickness, housing, education and cultural benefits. The government's ability to live up to this contract was often compromised and not always fulfilled.

TIMELINE OF SOCIAL SECURITY PROVISION

1918 Labour exchanges set up

1930 Government announces full employment achieved

1956 Minimum wage introduced, pension provision expanded

1957 Reduction in the working week

1956–65 Expansion of the housing programme

1966 Regular wages introduced for collective farmers

1974 Passport system extended to the rural population

Full employment, housing and social benefits, 1917–53

Given the chaos that accompanied the early years of Bolshevik rule, it is no surprise that the regime was slow to achieve social and material benefits for the population. Stalin's push to industrialise the Soviet Union in the 1930s transformed the labour market and not only produced full employment, but also labour shortages. Improvements in housing and other social benefits were much slower to be realised.

1956–65 – Expansion of housing programme

1964 – Khrushchev's reforms dropped

1964–82 – Period of developed socialism

1950 1955 1960 1965 1970 1975 1980

1958 – Khrushchev's educational reforms: emphasis placed on technical and vocational education



The labour market under Lenin

The collapse of industrial production during the civil war of 1918–21 resulted in a drift of factory workers to the countryside, where food supplies were more reliable. Those factories still in production found themselves without sufficient workers and the government resorted to issuing a decree that forced people without employment to take any work offered to them. In 1918, under War Communism, labour conscription was introduced to ensure that the Red Army was adequately supplied to win the civil war. Labour exchanges were established to supervise the hiring of workers, but fear of being forced into a job they did not want meant that many workers did not register with the exchanges.

The end of the civil war brought additional pressures to the labour market. The demobilisation of the Red Army returned millions of soldiers to the cities in search of work, and food shortages in the countryside led to a wave of workers and peasants drifting into the cities. Unemployment soared and reached over a million workers by 1926. Yet, for skilled workers, there was increasing job security under the economic growth of the NEP and real wages started to rise.

One feature of the job market during the years of the NEP was the continued use of *arteli* in the recruitment of labour. *Arteli* were groups of workers, usually in the same trade, who offered their services as a group and were paid as a group. They were led by older members, who arranged jobs and distributed pay, often based on age but in some cases based on the length of their beard. These groups were similar to the traditional peasant groups who pooled their tools and worked as teams to meet seasonal activities or work on construction projects. The government considered them to be a backward feature of the organisation of the economy and did not encourage their use, but by 1929 the use of 'shock brigades', made up of enthusiastic young communists, to work on construction projects owed much to this system.

Under the NEP, wage differentials grew as skilled workers demanded more money than their unskilled counterparts. The trend was encouraged by the relative shortage of skilled workers, much in demand as the economy recovered from the civil war. Thus there were increasing benefits for some sections of the working class.

Industrialisation and full employment

The Soviet government could hardly claim that the Five-Year Plans were launched to create full employment, but it was certainly achieved as a consequence of the push to industrialise. In 1930, the Soviet government announced that it was the first country to achieve full urban employment in peacetime. The number of hired workers rose from 11.6 million in 1928 to 27 million in 1937. Employment opportunities were plentiful with the rapid expansion in heavy industry. The excessive targets set by the government for industry resulted in factories using every available labour source. The lack of modern technology, with most work undertaken manually, put additional pressure on the labour force. Many had joined the urban and industrial workforce from the countryside. Large numbers of peasants drifted to the towns as a result of the process of collectivisation and the subsequent hardship inflicted on rural areas. Despite this, by 1932, there were labour shortages.

Full employment had a considerable impact on the workers.

- The swamping of the old industrial workers by new peasant recruits led to divisions in the workplace. The more established groups of skilled workers tried to protect their position and pay by discrimination and harassment of the newcomers.
- Restrictions were placed on trade unions, who were no longer allowed to negotiate with managers to improve conditions. Working conditions were poor, with little attention paid by the government to even basic levels of health and safety.
- In October 1930, unemployment benefit was cancelled in the light of full employment. Trade unions were left to act as providers of social insurance, dealing with issues such as compensation for injury out of their own funds.
- Vast numbers of jobs had been created, but productivity was low. In 1927, the average Soviet worker produced only half of what an average British worker produced. Productivity increased during the Five-Year Plans as machinery was produced, but it still lagged behind much of the industrialised West. To meet production targets, managers used uninterrupted work, that is, the use of day and night shifts so that machines could be kept busy for 24 hours every day. Long shifts with not much time off did little to improve the experience of the industrial worker. Much of the work was hard, repetitive and unchallenging.
- Labour shortages were a real fear for managers who were anxious to meet their production targets. Workers unhappy with their job constantly changed their occupation in search of better employment. In order to deal with this, the government issued a passport system. In 1932, an internal passport was needed to change jobs, and food rations were distributed through the workplace. Both policies were introduced to keep workers where they were needed. These measures were only partly successful. Even by 1937, 30 percent of all urban workers changed their job in each quarter of the year.
- In 1931, wage differences between skilled and unskilled workers were increased as an attempt by the government to reward skilled workers and discourage them from moving jobs. The following year, better rations and bonuses were introduced to add to the incentives. From 1934, the use of piecework rates (whereby workers were paid according to the amount they produced) was expanded, an action that pleased the more skilled section of the workforce as it increased the opportunity for them to earn higher wages. But higher wages were only a small incentive when there was so little in the shops to buy.
- Alongside material incentives, the government used honours and medals to motivate the workforce. Soviet workers were encouraged to work like the hero Alexei Stakhanov, a coalminer from the Donbass region who could mine 15 times the average amount of coal. Komsomol enthusiasts were used by the government to form 'shock brigades'. These were deployed to instil socialist values in the workforce in order to promote production. There were rewards for model workers, such as a new flat and bigger rations; slackers were held up to ridicule.

- One consequence of the restrictions on workers changing jobs was the increase in absenteeism. Harsh punishments were introduced for absent workers in key industries in 1931, but the problem persisted. By 1939, absenteeism was made a criminal offence that could result in imprisonment. Of course, with labour being in such short supply, these measures were not always applied. Slave labour from the labour camps had to be used to meet the need for workers.
- The pressure on labour was intense during the Second World War and there was little let-up after 1945. During the war, women were employed in greater numbers to help make up the shortfall caused by the conscription of men into the Red Army. Demobilisation of soldiers in 1945 returned many men to the workforce, but not necessarily where they were needed. Prisoners of war were used as forced labour, supplemented by the increasing numbers in the Gulag. Labour camp inmates rose from fewer than 1.5 million in 1945 to nearly 2.5 million in 1953.

Despite the achievement of full employment, at a time when most of the developed world was experiencing an economic depression that put millions out of work, the Soviet worker had a harsh, drab life. The demands of industrialisation in the 1930s were followed by the privations of the Second World War and the tough period of reconstruction from 1945 to 1953. It was to be a long time before some of the material benefits of full employment were enjoyed by many of the Soviet workforce.

Housing

The Soviet government was slow to make an impact on the provision of housing for its population. In 1917, the Bolsheviks began a programme of confiscating the large houses of the rich, partitioning them and renting them to families of workers. The principle of allocating housing according to need was often dropped in favour of distribution according to rank within the Communist Party. The reality was that there was not enough housing to meet the needs of all.

The enormous growth of towns and industrial centres under the Five-Year Plans put considerable strain on housing. Not only did housing receive few resources and a low priority, the focus on industrialisation greatly increased the demand for workers' housing. Established cities saw exceptional growth. Moscow's population increased from 2.2 million in 1929 to 4.1 million in 1936. Leningrad experienced huge growth too, from 1.6 million in 1926 to 3.4 million in 1939. Many new cities also emerged from the industrial development of the 1930s. The towns of the Donbass coal and steel region saw a doubling of their population in the 1930s. The population of Magnitogorsk rose from a mere 25 people in 1929 to 250,000 in 1932. These new industrial centres lacked the range of facilities usually associated with towns and cities. In the rush to industrialise, resources for housing were often non-existent. Workers had to sleep in tents, makeshift huts or even in the factories. Conditions improved throughout the 1930s, but often amounted to little more than the erection of drab barracks. Blocks of apartments were built where resources would allow. They all looked the same and often included elements designed to promote communism: kitchens were usually communal. The allocation of a modern apartment with running water, electricity and central heating was only a realistic hope for those workers who showed an impressive commitment to fulfilling the Plan.

In 1936, only six percent of rented units of housing consisted of more than one room and in 24 percent of cases it was only part of one room. Five percent of people renting lived in a kitchen or a corridor and 25 percent lived in dormitories. These figures illustrate the pressure that must have existed on family life. The cost of rented housing was very low, with few families spending more than eight percent of their income on accommodation, but the lack of privacy probably goes some way towards explaining the popularity of communist youth groups, which got children out of the home in the evenings.

Improvements in rural housing were even slower to materialise. Peasants on collectives were expected to provide for their own housing, which was more often than not little better than a one-room timber hut.

The lack of available housing was exacerbated by the damage caused during the Second World War. Some cities were particularly badly hit: Stalingrad lost 90 percent of its housing and Leningrad lost one-third during the siege of the city (1941–44). Housing remained a low priority under the Fourth and Fifth Five-Year Plans, which tackled post-war reconstruction by focusing on heavy industry. At least in Moscow, where vast resources were used to build an underground transport system, complete with stations decorated with sculptures and murals like palaces, workers could travel from their drab apartments to their equally drab workplace in some comfort.

EXTEND YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Battle of Stalingrad, 1942–43

One of the key battles of the Second World War. Hitler targeted the city of Stalingrad for its strategic position on the River Volga and because it was named after the Soviet leader. The battle was fought in the streets of the city, resulting in enormous destruction of housing and industry there, in addition to the damage inflicted by German air raids. The Soviet army used infantry and well-trained snipers to attack the Germans, whose tanks were restricted by the structures in the city. The German forces at Stalingrad surrendered in January 1943. Over one million Soviet soldiers had died in the battle; German casualties were equally high. The Soviet victory halted the German advance on the Eastern Front and was an important point in turning the war in favour of the Allies (Britain, the USSR and the USA). It also became a symbol of Soviet strength and endurance.

Siege of Leningrad, 1941–44

The city, of enormous symbolic value as the birthplace of the Revolution, was placed under siege by the German army from August 1941 until January 1944. Few supplies were able to get into the city during the siege, placing the city's population under extreme pressure. Most of the population of the city had not been evacuated in anticipation of the German advance. It was only during the winter, when the lake north of Leningrad froze over, that some supplies could be brought into the city across the ice. Unfortunately, temperatures of −40 degrees Fahrenheit resulted in many people freezing to death. Food rations were limited to as little as 125 grams of bread a day. People resorted to eating pets and crows and making bread out of sawdust. Cases of cannibalism were reported. The city was finally relieved by Soviet forces in January 1944. Nearly one million civilians died during the siege. Air raids had destroyed much of the city's housing and industry. The siege of Leningrad became an example of Soviet endurance against dreadful odds.

SOURCE 1 Assembly of apartment buildings from factory-made parts in Moscow, 1951.



ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

Housing during the 1930s

Look at Source 1. What would a Soviet citizen think of moving to one of the Stalinist apartment blocks shown in this photograph?

Social benefits

The workplace was the source of some social benefits for the Soviet worker. By the 1930s, cheap food was available within the workforce canteens. During the difficult years of the early 1930s, the government instructed canteens to keep rabbits to ensure a supply of meat for their workforce. Another benefit was that work clothes were given free of charge.

Social benefits were often provided by trade unions. Stripped of any real economic or political power, they nonetheless played a key role in organising sports facilities, meetings and film shows. Workers were given two weeks' paid holiday and this was usually taken on cheap, subsidised vacations to state resorts. Trade unions were responsible for arranging these holidays, although attendance could be based on an individual's attitude to their work. Sick pay was also organised through the trade unions. Thus, trade unions were an important aspect of a worker's life and expulsion from a union was a serious matter.

Health care was designed by the government to benefit all of the population and, despite limited resources, it proved effective at containing epidemics. A compulsory vaccination programme was implemented to deal with a serious cholera epidemic in 1921. Lice-spread typhus was a serious issue between 1918 and 1920, resulting in over six million deaths. Lenin launched a campaign to eradicate the problem, declaring: 'Either lice will defeat socialism or socialism will defeat lice.' Many doctors had fled Russia soon after the Revolution in 1917 and this weakened health-care provision. The government was forced to increase the number of training places on offer. As a result, the number of doctors increased from 70,000 in 1928 to 155,000 in 1940. The number of hospital beds rose from 247,000 in 1928 to 791,000 in 1939. Quantity was no guarantee of quality, but there is no doubt that these figures represent considerable improvements through this period. Sanitation was taken seriously and all sanitary inspectors were given the status of doctors. Patients had no choice in health care and all medicines had to be paid for, albeit at a cheap, subsidised rate. Much of this progress was due to women training to enter the medical profession in large numbers.

By 1953, the Soviet worker was likely to be employed, housed and in receipt of basic social services. Life was harsh and the provision of services remained more primitive, if not non-existent, in rural areas. The promised socialist utopia had yet to be realised.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

The provision of social security, 1917–53

1 Make a list of the main requirements needed to ensure social security. Which of these requirements was the most important in order to achieve social stability? Justify your answer.

2 How effective was the Soviet government at providing these requirements in the period 1917 to 1953?

Khrushchev, Brezhnev and the promotion of a stable society, 1953–85

After the social upheavals of the Stalin years, Soviet society became more stable under Khrushchev and Brezhnev. The hardships that had accompanied the rapid industrialisation of the 1930s and the Second World War gave way to a more prosperous period, which allowed Khrushchev to declare in 1961 that the Soviet population would finally enjoy the benefits of socialism.

SOURCE 2 Khrushchev's Programme of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, adopted by the Twenty-Second Congress, 31 October 1961.

In the current decade the Soviet Union, in creating the material and technical basis of communism, will surpass the strongest and richest capitalist country, the USA, in production per head of population; the people's standard of living and their cultural and technical standards will improve substantially; everyone will live in easy circumstances; all collective and state farms will become highly productive and profitable enterprises; the demand of Soviet people for well-appointed housing will, in the main, be satisfied; hard physical work will disappear; the USSR will have the shortest working day.

The material and technical basis of communism will be built up by the end of the second decade (1971–1980), ensuring an abundance of material and cultural values for the whole population... Thus, a communist society will be built in the USSR.

Khrushchev's statement was, of course, over-optimistic propaganda, but it highlighted the basis of what was to become a more stable society in the Soviet Union: greater economic prosperity. The final date for the achievement of communism was, inevitably, not met, but progress had been tangible enough for Brezhnev to talk about the move to developed socialism.

SOURCE 3 From a report by Brezhnev to the Central Committee, 'On the Draft Constitution of the USSR', 24 May 1977.

The draft of the new Constitution also states that a developed socialist society has been created in the USSR and that the supreme goal of the Soviet state is the building of communism. It is emphasised that our state is the state of all the people and it expresses the will and interests of the working class, the peasantry and the intelligentsia, of all the country's nations and nationalities...

Developed socialism was the term applied to a Soviet society that had become instilled with the values of the Revolution: collectivism, political consciousness and an active participation driven by revolutionary spirit. It may have been a propaganda slogan that over-exaggerated reality, but there is no doubt that by the 1970s there was a lot of support for a social system that provided advantages and material rewards for the majority. It was this support that gave Soviet society under Brezhnev considerable stability.

What were the key features of social stability under developed socialism?

- **Full employment**
  The Soviet Constitution of 1977 guaranteed its citizens employment. Full employment had been a feature of Soviet life since the 1930s and continued to be so through the Khrushchev and Brezhnev years. There was some unemployment: seasonal work such as farming often resulted in short-term unemployment in rural areas, and it was common for graduates to experience a short period of unemployment after finishing university. Moreover, having employment was no guarantee of job satisfaction and many jobs were created that were undemanding, repetitive and sometimes pointless. What often made a difference was the increase in real wages. According to historian Gertrude Schroeder, real wages (wages compared with prices) rose by 50 percent between 1967 and 1977. This increase gave Soviet workers more spending power. Most Soviet workers accumulated savings due to the fact that there was a scarcity of goods in the shops and that low prices were fixed by the government. Nonetheless, economic historian Philip Hanson puts the increase in per capita consumption at an annual increase of 3.8 percent for the Khrushchev years. What really helped stability was the limited gap between the best paid and the worst paid. Wage differentials were relatively low, less than half of that of the USA in 1970: enough to offer workers the chance of material gain through hard work, but not wide enough to cause anger over excessive inequality.

- **Job security**
  There were other advantages for the Soviet worker. It was very difficult to dismiss someone who was not good at their job, whether that was due to laziness, incompetence or alcoholism. Managers often ignored low standards of work discipline as workers were absent to queue for food and other items in the shops or **moonlighting** to earn extra money on the side. This would then be followed by a short period of intense work at the end of the month to ensure production targets were met. Labour turnover remained high, often at a rate of 30 percent each year, as workers moved to jobs where the managers offered more benefits. A minimum wage was introduced in 1956, which was designed to ensure no workers were below the poverty line, but hardships remained for those workers who had to support families on the minimum wage. The working week was reduced in 1957 and the number of days' paid holiday increased.

- **Improved material benefits**
  The greater availability of consumer goods played a central role in ensuring a contented society. Khrushchev had moved economic resources away from heavy industry towards consumer goods and Brezhnev continued this trend. For the first time, the Ninth Five-Year Plan of 1971–75 set a higher growth rate for consumer goods than heavy industry. The ability to deliver an improvement in the quality of life was seen by the government as legitimising the rule of the Communist Party. Targets for the production of consumer goods were not met, but progress was sufficient for the population to recognise real improvements. Sustained economic growth, often relying on skilled rather than unskilled labour, also ensured that there were greater opportunities for upward mobility within the Soviet system.

- **The nomenklatura system**
  A key feature that tied the population to the state was the fact that, for the vast majority, the state was their employer. The Central Committee of the Communist Party had developed the nomenklatura system into a vast apparatus of patronage. The Party was responsible for appointments in virtually every economic enterprise. Promotions were the source of higher wages and greater rewards and privileges. A worker's place of employment depended on securing an internal passport and dwelling permit, those for jobs and residence in Moscow being the most sought after. After 1974, collective farmers were allowed passports, bringing farmers into a system that offered some hope of mobility and betterment for the rural population. Getting a passport and permit was much easier if you were educated and had become a Party activist. Taking part in unpaid propaganda campaigns helped gain a position in the local Party branch. A period of ideological study at a Party school was also a useful action for securing promotion. It is no surprise that membership of the Communist Party grew considerably, from 6.9 million in 1953 to 17 million in 1980. By the end of the 1970s, 20 percent of all males over the age of 30 were Party members. Ultimately, advancement depended on having a recommendation from a sponsor within the Party, and this process was responsible for building in loyalty to the system and enormous stability. Risk-takers and troublemakers – often the same people – found it very difficult to rise within the system. Under Brezhnev's leadership, this trend was entrenched. A pattern developed whereby people were promoted within the region that they were born and lived in rather than moving on with promotion, which had been common during the Khrushchev era in order to keep officials fresh and encourage innovation. The Party, at all levels, was ensuring that control remained with their chosen successors. One consequence of this trend was an increase in **nepotism**: Khrushchev's son-in-law, Alexei Adzhubei, became editor of *Izvestiya*; Brezhnev's son Yuri became a deputy minister of foreign trade; Kosygin's son-in-law became head of the State Committee for Science and Technology.

- **The education system**
  Attachment to the Party was reinforced through the education system, which did its best to instil socialist values from a young age. For those children whose parents wished them to progress to good jobs and benefit from the status attached, the usual route was to complete secondary education before entering higher education. This became one of the most important vehicles for gaining social status in Soviet society because good educational qualifications helped secure better jobs and increased promotion chances.

KEY TERMS

Moonlighting
Unofficial working, usually in a worker's spare time, using tools and materials that in many cases were stolen from factories and businesses. Many workers used this as a way to supplement their income.

Nepotism
Appointing relatives to key positions irrespective of their merit.

Both boys and girls had equality of access to education and by the 1980s the number of female students continuing to higher education matched that of males. Schools in large urban areas tended to attract better teachers, especially in residential areas occupied by the elite. Thus, education played a key role in perpetuating a Soviet elite.

- **Youth groups**
  These also provided opportunities to mould the young, both boys and girls, into committed communists. Progression from the Octobrists, for those aged five to nine, through the Pioneers (for ages 10 to 14) to Komsomol (for those aged up to 28) was important if you wanted to join the Party and therefore secure better promotion prospects.
- **The provision and range of social security benefits**
  Between 1950 and 1980, state welfare spending increased fivefold. Pensions, maternity benefits and housing all received more attention and did much to relieve poverty. In 1956 the pension scheme for the old, sick and disabled was expanded and the retirement age was reduced. Pensions rose at a higher rate than wages during the Brezhnev period but remained insufficient, for example 40 roubles a month in 1980. This encouraged many to continue to work part-time after reaching retirement age. The armies of street sweepers who cleared the pavements of winter snow were recruited from the elderly. Peasants did not receive a pension until the Brezhnev era.
- **Housing**
  Many Soviet lives were improved by Khrushchev's extensive housing programme. The annual amount of housing space provided by the state increased from 178 million square metres in 1951 to 394 million square metres in 1961. Most of this new housing was provided directly by the state or through co-operatives assisted by government credits. The edges of many Soviet cities resembled building sites, with endless housing blocks erected in a sea of mud. Housing blocks were nicknamed *khrushchoby* (Khrushchev's slums). The housing was based on prefabricated panels built to a standard design. This process helped the speed and cost of building but resulted in drab, uniform housing that was often poorly finished in the rush to meet targets. Occupants often complained that concrete blocks were left inside their apartments and that finishing touches, such as plastering, were left for them to do. Despite these problems, waiting lists for apartments were still long as many had been living in far worse conditions beforehand.
- **Health care**
  There was considerable growth in the provision of health care during the period 1950 to 1980. Availability of health care was not a problem for the Soviet population, but the quality of the provision was much more problematic. Polyclinics provided all-purpose health care in the first instance with referral to specialists where deemed necessary. Many workers made use of these services, partly encouraged by the right to time off work to see a doctor. A Russian tradition was the use of sanatoria, a sort of rest home with medical facilities. In 1978, there were over 2,000 sanatoria and over 1,000 rest homes linked to medical care. Workers were entitled to take time at one of these establishments for a wide range of conditions that included high blood pressure, heart problems and stomach complaints. Most places were allocated by trade unions. The best medical services were available in Moscow, with Leningrad and other major cities not far behind. Provincial cities had fewer services and those in rural areas were primitive. The Central Asian republics of the USSR were particularly badly served; even as recently as 1988 some hospitals did not have heating or running water. Equipment in most hospitals was poorly made, outdated and often in need of repair.
- **Living conditions in the countryside**
  The increased investment in agriculture, which had occurred under Khrushchev, was continued by Brezhnev. Some of this investment was used to build schools, housing and health services in rural areas. Incomes of collective farmers were increased in 1966 when the government introduced regular wages rather than payment based on a share of the farm's income. By the mid-1970s, the wages of rural workers were only ten percent less than their urban counterparts. Collective farmers could also supplement their wage with the produce from their private plot.

By the 1970s, the majority of the Soviet population were experiencing benefits from the great Soviet experiment. State control over the economy and social welfare provision meant that they had a stake in keeping the system as it was and this helped create the underlying stability of developed socialism.

How stable was society under developed socialism?

With the increase in living standards there had been a rise in the expectations of the Soviet population. These greater expectations provided occasional problems for the government and show that the apparent stability of Soviet society could be undermined.

That the Soviet government feared social instability is shown by its nervous reaction to developments in its **satellite states** in Eastern Europe. There had been an uprising against Soviet rule in Hungary in 1956, which had resulted in Soviet tanks invading the country to maintain communist rule. Soviet military intervention had also been used in Czechoslovakia in 1968 to quell serious unrest. Soviet intervention to deal with popular unrest in Poland was avoided in 1980 when the Polish government declared martial law to prop up the communist regime. The Polish protests were over food prices and echoed many of the issues causing discontent in the Soviet Union itself.

Open protest caused by workers' discontent was rare in the Soviet Union, but it did occur. It was usually caused by changes to living or working conditions but tended to encompass wider aspects of life for which the government could be deemed responsible.

KEY TERM

Satellite state
Those states of Eastern Europe, such as Poland, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary and Bulgaria, that had communism imposed on them by the USSR after the Second World War. They were tightly controlled through political and economic ties with the USSR.

Evidence of protest

- There was serious unrest in Temirtau in 1959. Temirtau was a new industrial centre in Kazakhstan. The Party had encouraged enthusiastic Komsomol members to flock to the town in order to help build the new metal works. Many responded, but their enthusiasm was quickly dented by the appalling living conditions they were expected to endure, a lack of clean water and few supplies of food. To add insult to injury, they discovered that East German and Polish workers at the site were being paid more. In protest, the young workers burnt down the workplace canteen and hanged the local police chief. KGB troops were used to restore order and several dozen protestors were killed.
- There was a wave of protests over food prices in 1962, when the government increased the price of meat and dairy products. At Novocherkassk, the protests developed into serious unrest when the local factory manager reduced wages at the same time. The workers blamed the government, in particular Khrushchev. Their slogan was 'Cut up Khrushchev for sausages'. At least 70 people were killed before order was restored. The seriousness of the affair was indicated by the fact that members of the *presidium* (Politburo) were sent to the town to investigate. Extra food supplies were rushed to the area to quell further trouble.
- There were strikes and riots over food shortages in Sverdlovsk in 1969 and Gorki in 1980. Unrest over poor housing provision occurred in Kiev in 1969. In each case, the situation tended to escalate due to clumsy actions by the local police before order was finally restored. Incidents like these made the government nervous, but they were spontaneous and improvised demonstrations. The setting up of the Free Trade Union Association in 1977 was different. The association sought to represent the real grievances of Soviet workers rather than them having to rely on the government-controlled, and therefore restricted, trade unions that already existed. The government took action quickly and the organisation's leader, Vladimir Klebanov, was dismissed from his job and evicted from his flat. The point was made: what the state had provided, it could take away. The Association gained little open support and came to nothing.
- Terrorist actions were rare, but not unknown: in 1977, a bomb on the Moscow Metro killed several passengers. In 1969, there was an assassination attempt on Brezhnev when his motorcade was fired at. The assassin fired at the wrong car, killing the driver but leaving Brezhnev untouched. The assassin had no political motive and the official explanation was that he was mentally unstable. These incidents did not indicate a broader revolutionary movement aimed at overthrowing the government.

Soviet society was predominantly stable, but this does not mean that it was without social problems, which had a detrimental effect on social cohesion.

- The Second World War had killed a disproportionate number of young men and that led to a generation growing up without a father figure in the home. The lack of good role models for young men was possibly one of the causes of the high rate of divorce in the Soviet Union. In 1979, the divorce rate was 340 for every 1,000 marriages.
- Alcoholism, especially among men, was a serious problem. Between 1940 and 1980, when the Soviet population grew by 25 percent, alcohol consumption increased by 600 percent. There were an estimated 20 million alcoholics in the USSR in 1987.
- Hooliganism, while never on the scale of that in other countries in the developed world, was a cause of concern. In the 1970s, commuters in Moscow complained about being robbed by young thugs on evening trains. In 1975, the government introduced a one-year course on 'Principles of the Soviet State and Law' to make young Soviet citizens aware of their obligations. The gangs of *stilyagi* (nonconformists) may have been harmless, but their liking for the music of protest and nonconformist fashions worried the older generation.

Thus, beneath the surface of social stability lay social ills that threatened the cohesion of the family and, with it, society as a whole. What also undermined the stability of society in the longer term was the fact that it was based on an increasingly inefficient economic basis. There may have been full employment and considerable provision of social welfare, but it was based on poor productivity and corrupt practices. In the end, this system could not be sustained.

A Level Exam-Style Question Section A

Was the provision of full employment the main reason for social stability in the USSR during the years 1953–85? (20 marks)

Tip

Explain how the government's policy of full employment promoted social stability. What other factors helped create social stability? Give reasons why you think full employment may or may not have been the main reason. Are the factors linked?

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

Social stability under developed socialism

1 List the factors that provided stability in Soviet society under the Khrushchev and Brezhnev years.
2 Explain how each of these reasons helped create stability.
3 How far would you agree that Soviet society under developed socialism was stable?
4 Did this stability have any negative consequences?

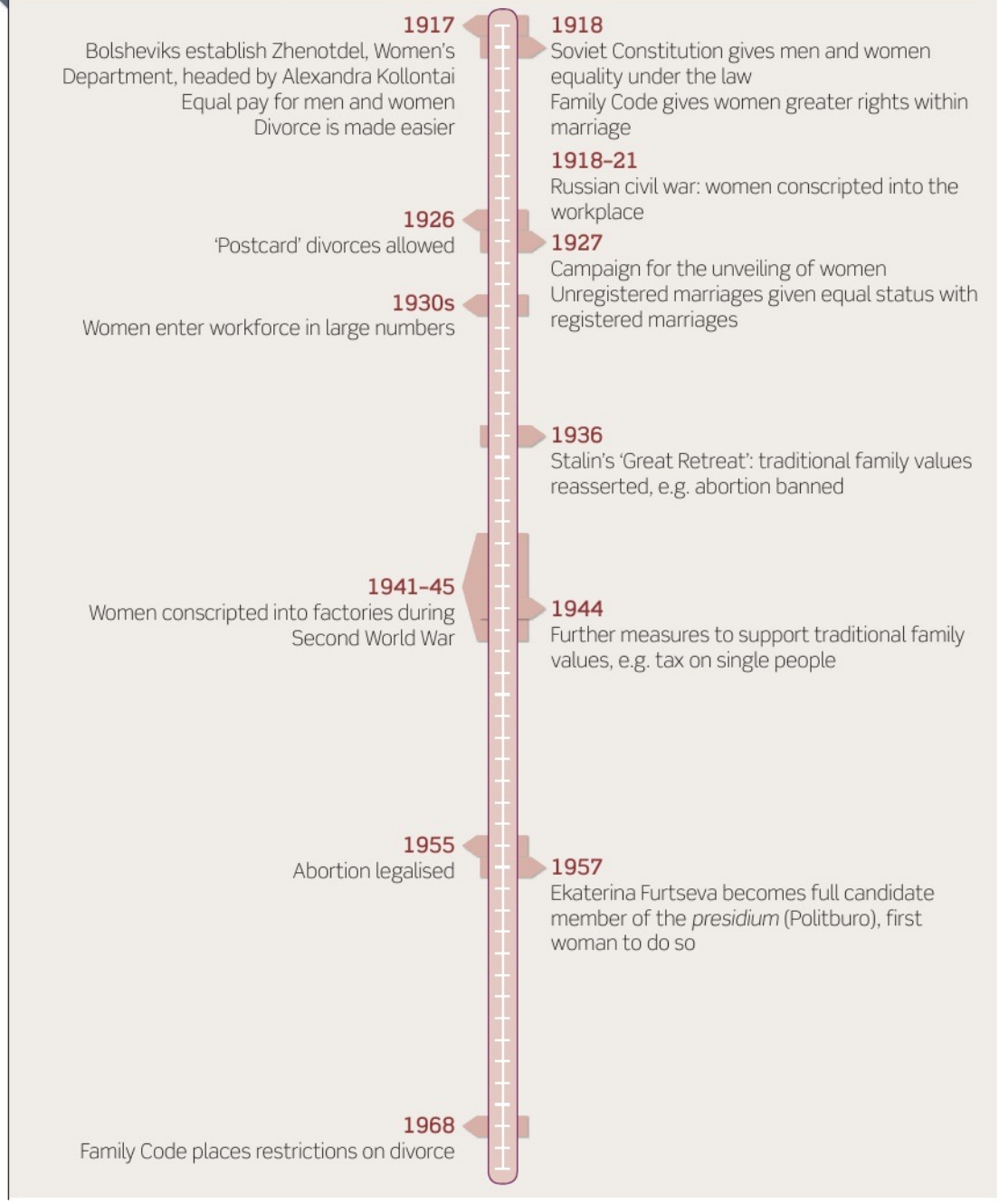
TO WHAT EXTENT DID THE ROLE OF WOMEN AND THE FAMILY CHANGE BETWEEN 1917 AND 1985?

The **emancipation** of women had been a goal of most Russian radicals since the middle of the 19th century and the position of women was one area where the communists made important developments on coming to power. Lenin had written of the 'bourgeois' nature of marriage as a form of slavery, tying the woman to the male-dominated institution of family. A woman's role as a housewife was perceived as suppression into a life of drudgery. Radical communists called for sweeping reforms to liberate women, but their ideas did not always find favour with more conservative Party members. The circumstances of war and industrialisation meant that the position of women within society did not always improve and, where policies did attempt to bring positive changes, attitudes were often resistant to change. A return to more traditional attitudes to the family after 1935 meant that the liberation of women that radicals had hoped for did not materialise. It marked a move away from the ideals of Lenin.

KEY TERM

Emancipation
The process of setting free groups or individuals. In respect to the role of women, Russian laws before the Bolshevik Revolution had given women a position that was subordinate to men. Russian radicals wanted to change this by giving women greater rights and equality under the law.

TIMELINE FOR WOMEN AND THE FAMILY



The changing status of different groups of women in towns and countryside

There is an old Russian proverb that says 'The more you beat your wife the better the soup will taste'. This saying, fairly typical of male attitudes to women at the start of the 20th century, gives an indication of traditional views towards women in Russia. It was against this ingrained sexism that feminists within the Bolshevik Party tried to improve the status of women. On seizing power in 1917, the Bolsheviks established a women's branch of the Central Committee, Zhenotdel, to promote the status of women within socialist notions of equality.

Measures aimed at improving the position of women were driven partly by ideological considerations, communist ideas of equality between the sexes. Radical communists argued that the communal organisation of household chores and childcare would liberate women from domestic drudgery. On seizing power in 1917, the Bolsheviks rushed through a series of decrees that gave women greater status and freedom within marriage: divorce was made easier and abortion was legalised. The laws that made a woman obey her husband, live with him and take his name were abolished. Women no longer needed their husband's permission to take a job or study in further education. Lenin addressed a women's congress in 1918, where he was cheered for suggesting that *baba*, the derogatory term for a woman, be banned. The principle of equal pay for men and women was passed into law in December 1917 and maternity leave arrangements were granted. When the Soviet constitution of 1918 declared that men and women were equal, the legal status of women had been put on an equal footing to that of men. But this should not be taken to mean that the status of women in society had automatically improved.

These attempts to change the role and status of women also gave rise to some worrying features. The rise in the divorce rate did little to help women support children: few received financial support from the father of their child. Feminists in the Party had hoped that easier divorce would prevent women becoming trapped in abusive relationships, but the reality was that 70 percent of divorces were initiated by men, often abandoning women who had become pregnant. The laws giving women equal rights in employment and equal pay were slow to have an impact. Attitudes of the male population were slow to change.

The impact of the civil war

What changed the role and status of women in the workplace was the civil war of 1918–21. The increase in the number of women in the workforce was driven less by ideological notions of equality than the reality of needing industrial workers during the war. The result was that, despite increasing employment opportunities, women's lives often changed for the worse.

- Over 70,000 women fought in the Red Army during the war, but few held high rank.
- Millions of women were recruited into factories, but social provision for childcare was inadequate.
- Despite the desire of the regime to provide crèches for all young children, the government lacked the resources to implement this.

However, the long-term impact of the civil war on women in the workforce was to be limited.

- Women generally were more likely to be unskilled and many lost their jobs when soldiers returned to civilian life after the war was won.
- Traditional attitudes that women were unsuitable for heavy manual work persisted, as did the attitude that women were less likely to stay in a post due to pregnancy and maternity leave.
- The disruption of war and the subsequent famine of 1921–22 left many women homeless and destitute. A rise in prostitution reflected the desperation of large numbers of urban women.

EXTEND YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Alexandra Kollontai (1872–1952)

A leading Bolshevik figure in the early years of the regime. She was the first woman to be a member of a government in Europe. Kollontai was a feminist and a believer in free love, the idea that love and sex need not be confined to those married to each other. This was a view that upset some more conservative Bolsheviks. As a member of the Central Committee, she was able to influence policies towards women, the family and health. She was made head of Zhenotdel, the Bolshevik Party's Women's Department, in 1920. She supported the Workers Opposition group who opposed Lenin's plans to remove power from the trade unions. Her influence waned after 1921 and she was sent to Oslo in 1923 to represent the Soviet government in Norway. Stalin disliked her progressive ideas, and her measures were reversed during the 1930s. She served as Ambassador to Sweden between 1943 and 1945. Her private life and lovers were often the cause of scandal, but her view on sex had been made clear in her writings: 'sexuality is a human instinct as natural as hunger or thirst'. Her ideas and writings continued to influence the development of feminism for the rest of the 20th century.

Changes to the status of Islamic women

Particularly resistant to change were the Muslim areas of Central Asia, where the polygamous, male-dominated family was well entrenched. In these areas women were shielded from public view, often veiled and denied an education. The Bolsheviks attempted to break down these traditional attitudes by using young female activists who encouraged unveiling, while explaining basic contraception, personal hygiene and childcare. The campaign against the veiling of women in 1927 met with some success. Opportunities for Islamic women increased and female brigade leaders and tractor drivers were celebrated through films and posters. Despite these changes, traditional Islamic attitudes were slow to change and resistance was often violent. At Baku, a Zhenotdel meeting was attacked by Muslim men with dogs and boiling water. Women who refused to wear traditional dress were sometimes killed by members of their own family in 'honour' killings. By the 1930s, the Soviet government took a softer, more gradual approach to changing the Muslim population's attitude to women.

The impact of collectivisation and industrialisation on women in the countryside

In 1930, the Party closed down Zhenotdel, claiming that women's issues had been solved. This was a reflection of the attitudes of the male-dominated Party, which had always been half-hearted in its support for women's issues. Nonetheless, the policies enacted by the Party in the 1930s were to have far-reaching consequences for

the lives of women. As at least 50 percent of the total population were women, they shared the burdens of collectivisation and industrialisation.

The policy of forced collectivisation in the countryside resulted in many men departing for the towns in search of better jobs. Some sent money back to their wives; others deserted them. Collectivisation came to rely more and more on the labours of women. Agricultural work offered low wages, and life in the countryside meant fewer services; both were a reflection of the lower status attached to agriculture over industry. The status of women in rural areas reflected this general pattern. In addition, it was in rural areas that traditional attitudes to women were more entrenched and slower to change.

The impact of the Second World War accelerated these trends. The most able-bodied men from the collectives were conscripted into the armed forces and women provided the bulk of the agricultural workforce. Conditions were made worse by the Red Army's requisitioning of machinery and draft animals.

The imbalance between the sexes in the countryside was even more pronounced after the war. Returning soldiers preferred to try their luck by moving to the cities for work. Rural areas lacked able-bodied men, adding to the shortage of males caused by losses in the war. Even as late as 1950, it was possible to find villages entirely populated by women and children. The shortage of livestock added to the problem and women often had little choice but to shackle themselves to ploughs in order to till the soil.

In the Khrushchev and Brezhnev years, the status of rural women improved slowly as social provision, such as health care and maternity benefits, was extended to the countryside. The extension of the internal passport system to collective workers in 1974 provided the freedom for women to move to towns in search of jobs that commanded greater status and pay. However, the reality was that the opportunity to move was more likely to be taken by young males, exacerbating the trend of leaving low-status agricultural work to females.

The impact of collectivisation and industrialisation on women in the towns

The pressure for labour in industry under the Five-Year Plans meant that women were given little choice but to work. Work was no longer a symbol of female liberation, but a socialist duty. The economic hardships of the 1930s forced many women to work out of economic necessity. The number of female workers rose substantially in the 1930s, from three million in 1928 to over 13 million in 1940. Women dominated the workforce in light industry, especially textiles, but were increasingly found in occupations previously considered to be the preserve of male workers. Women entered the construction industry and worked in lumbering and engineering. Parts of the Moscow underground were built by brigades of female workers (like the one depicted making munitions in Source 4). Women were used as role models, such as the tractor driver Praskovia Angelina, to encourage and motivate the female workforce.

In the towns women were better placed to take advantage of the expansion in higher education. In 1929, the government reserved 20 percent of higher education places for women. This was a rather modest increase on the 14 percent already occupied by women, but by 1940 over 40 percent of engineering students were female. Gaining a higher-level education was often a passport to improving the status of an individual woman, as was becoming a Party activist. Both improved the chances of promotion and provided a route for upward mobility in society. The number of women in skilled jobs and management remained disproportionately low but showed an increase throughout the 1930s. Women started to make up a high percentage of jobs in the expanding areas of health care and education, although neither sector offered high wages and the top levels of these sectors were still dominated by men.

The 1930s saw the emergence of a more privileged group of urban women, the wives of the Soviet elite. Those married to industrial managers or Party officials did not have to enter the workforce and were encouraged, instead, to do 'social work'. This included activities such as providing curtains in workers' dormitories, providing classes on hygiene, and organising cultural productions in the workplace. There was even a magazine aimed at this group, entitled *The Socially Active Woman*. It was a subtle way of reinforcing social divisions among women.

SOURCE 4 A Soviet poster from 1942, calling for women to play their part in the war effort.



The importance of women in industry continued to increase during the Second World War with women taking over jobs previously held by men who had been conscripted into the Red Army. Women could also improve their status by joining the Red Army themselves. An initial wave of female volunteers in 1941 was turned away. Despite its claims of promoting equality of the sexes, the Soviet government did not consider women to be suitable for active combat. Heavy losses caused the government to reluctantly change its mind. Some 800,000 women served in the armed forces during the Second World War, most in medical units but also as pilots, machine-gunners and tank crews. Eighty-nine women received the Soviet Union's highest military award, Hero of the Soviet Union. As with the situation after the civil war, many women either lost their jobs or reverted to unskilled roles after the war was won and the men returned to civilian life. Nonetheless, the line between what was considered to be male work and what was considered female work was blurred, far more so than in the developed capitalist countries of the West.

By the 1950s, the attitude that women were expected to work and could do so in a wide range of occupations was widespread. Unfortunately, women were still expected to play the key role in looking after the home and providing for their husband and children. This double burden put considerable pressure on women and made career progression difficult.

Women in politics

The Provisional Government of 1917 had given women the vote for the first time. Despite this, the number of women who played an active role in politics remained limited. Even in the Communist Party, with its declarations of sexual equality, women were seriously under-represented at all levels. In 1932, women made up 16 percent of Party membership. Female delegates at Party congresses did not exceed ten percent before 1939. This under-representation was particularly noticeable at the higher levels of the Party organisation. Alexandra Kollontai was the first woman to become a people's commissar, serving as Commissar for Public Welfare from 1917 to 1918. She later became the first female ambassador in history. However, her role was an exception. Only seven women were members of the Central Committee before the Second World War: the two most prominent being Kollontai and Nadezhda Krupskaya, Lenin's wife. The first woman to become a full candidate member of the top body within the Party was Ekaterina Furtseva, who became a member of the *presidium* (the renamed Politburo) in 1957. She was a favourite of Khrushchev and consequently her career declined when he was dismissed in 1964. The Soviet Union had to wait until September 1988 before another woman made it into the Party's top body: Alexandra Biryukova. Political power was still overwhelmingly in the hands of men.

Role models

Posters, statues and other propaganda material presented images of the ideal socialist woman playing her part in the development of socialism. There is no doubt that these images encouraged many women to play an active part in the Soviet state. Role models of individual women who excelled in their field were also available to the female population.

- There was a long line of famous ballerinas, including Natalia Bessmertnova, at the Bolshoi Ballet company.
- The actress Ludmila Savelyeva became famous for her role in the Soviet film *War and Peace* (1967).
- Sport was given high status by the Soviet government and this included putting resources into the development of women's sport. Notable figures included the pairs figure skater, Irina Rodnina, who with different partners won ten successive world championships and three successive Olympic titles. In gymnastics, Ludmilla Tourischeva won nine Olympic medals between 1968 and 1976, and Olga Korbut captivated audiences at home and abroad with her routines at the Munich Olympics of 1972.
- Perhaps the most notable example of a Soviet role model for women was Valentina Tereshkova, who in 1963 became the first woman in space. Yuri Gagarin had become the first man in space in 1961 and, like Gagarin, Tereshkova was treated as a Soviet hero (see Source 5). She had an impeccable proletarian background and became a prominent member of the Communist Party. She is still revered as a hero in present-day Russia. Few Soviet women could match the status given to Tereshkova.

There was no doubt that Soviet women could excel, but often this was within a field that was restricted. The Soviet propaganda image of the industrial worker and peasant, which was widespread in the USSR, is perhaps more representative of the status of women in reality: the industrial worker was always male and it was the peasant who was female, a reflection of the subsidiary role agriculture, and women, took compared with industry and men.

SOURCE 5 A Soviet stamp issued in 1983, commemorating Valentina Tereshkova as the first woman in space.



Despite gaining equality under the law as early as 1918, the status of women in Soviet society lagged behind that of men. Improvements in employment and social provision had helped raise the material well-being of women, especially in towns, but they were expected to do the majority of household chores, take the dominant role in bringing up children, queue for food and hold down a full-time job. Crucially, their influence in politics remained low and policies affecting women, especially in matters of the family, were largely decided by men in the Party.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

The changing status of different groups of women

1 Outline the key features of the lives of the following groups of women in Soviet society:

a) a female worker on a collective

b) a woman working in a Leningrad factory

c) a Muslim woman from the Kazhak region of the USSR

d) the wife of a top Party official in Moscow.

2 Rank the groups of women above according to their status in society. Explain your decision.

3 What factors (a) promoted and (b) restricted the status of women during the period 1917–85?

AS Level Exam-Style Question Section B

To what extent did the lives of women in the USSR improve between 1917 and 1985? (20 marks)

Tip

Think about evidence you could use to support the argument that the lives of women improved, especially in terms of their status. What evidence could you use to argue that their lives did not improve? Think about different groups of women. Did all women share the same experience? Think about change through time. Did the lives of women improve more quickly at certain times?

Changing government attitudes towards the family as a social unit

Changing views on the role of the family were to impact greatly on the lives of women. To more radical Bolsheviks, the family was an outdated institution that deserved to be swept away. In reality, however, the complete destruction of the traditional family was never a serious policy. This is not to say that there were no attacks on the traditional idea of the family. Youth groups were encouraged to attack the 'capitalist tyranny of parents' and Party sections were set up to educate women members to become more assertive and independent. Wives were encouraged to refuse obedience to their husbands. Led by the Bolshevik, Alexandra Kollontai, there were calls for greater sexual freedom for women. She proposed a 'new proletarian morality' in place of 'bourgeois marriage': sexual intercourse should not be based on marriage but on a union of free love. To young, radical Bolsheviks, 'free love' was taken to mean casual sex and many considered it to be a right to which they were entitled. These attitudes were shocking to older, more traditional Bolsheviks, including Lenin, and attempts were made to impose a more restrained attitude. Other attempts to remould the family consisted of an encouragement for communal spaces in housing blocks. Communal living by several families would break down the traditional family unit. Some of these radical ideas influenced the Family Code drawn up by the Bolsheviks after taking power.

The Family Code of 1918

Kollontai was of the opinion that, under socialism, 'the family ceases to be necessary' as she believed the state could take over the role of bringing up children and providing social services. This was to be an idealistic view, but measures specifically targeted at women were to have an impact on the family. Women were given a range of new rights and freedoms, including rights within marriage. The Bolshevik's Family Code of 1918 made divorce easier. A marriage could be dissolved at the request of either the husband or the wife, without the need to give grounds, such as adultery or cruelty. Abortion was made legal and crèches were encouraged. Although these reforms were driven partly by a need to get more women into work during the civil war, they were also an attack on the traditional oppression and maltreatment of women through the institution of the family. They were also part of the process of reducing the hold of the Russian Orthodox Church on family life and morality. The traditional institution of marriage was weakened further in 1927 when a new marriage law gave equal status under the law to registered and unregistered marriages, those where couples lived together as a family but had not formally registered their union with the authorities.

These measures had some success. The urban population made use of the opportunities to divorce and have abortions. By the mid-1920s, Russia's divorce rate was the highest in Europe. In 1926, the Family Code was revised to make divorce even easier and led to so-called 'postcard divorces', where a partner could simply notify their wife or husband of divorce by sending them a postcard. By 1926, 50 percent of all marriages in Moscow ended in divorce. Abortion became commonplace in the cities, reflecting the fact that methods of contraception were in very short supply. In Moscow, abortions outnumbered live births by 3 : 1 and the birth rate remained low. The break-up of families led to an increase in orphans who roamed the streets of towns, to the concern of the authorities. The government was put under pressure by critics, often from poorer sections of society, to revert to more conservative policies.

The 'Great Retreat' of 1936

By the mid-1930s, the government had become so concerned about the detrimental effects of family breakdowns that measures were introduced to raise the status of marriage. These concerns led to the so-called 'Great Retreat' of 1936, when Stalin issued a series of more conservative laws that went some way to restoring the importance of the traditional family.

The main changes included the following.

- Divorce was made more expensive, increasing from 4 roubles to 50.
- Free marriages lost their legal status and the government stated that family responsibilities were to be taken seriously.
- Male homosexuality was declared illegal.
- Abortion was outlawed except in cases where the life of the mother was at risk.
- Pregnant women were guaranteed job security and the right to be given lighter work. Maternity leave was extended to 16 weeks.

- Gold wedding rings, which had been discouraged as being 'bourgeois', started to reappear in shops.
- More resources were devoted to building crèches and day-care centres. The number of nursery places doubled between 1928 and 1930 and continued to grow during the Second Five-Year Plan.
- Two-year prison sentences were brought in for fathers who did not pay towards the upkeep of their children, but most local authorities viewed chasing such cases as a low priority.

During this 'Great Retreat' on social policy the idea of the family as an unnecessary 'bourgeois' concept was replaced by the view that the family was a necessary unit of socialist society. Traditional values were reasserted. Further strengthening of the family took place in July 1944.

- As an attempt to raise the status of the family, the government introduced awards for 'mother-heroines' who had ten or more children.
- A tax on single people was introduced to encourage marriage.
- Divorce was made more complicated and couples could be forced to go to a District Court to attempt reconciliation.

Changes under Khrushchev

Much of the social stability of the Khrushchev years was underpinned by the government's promotion of the family as a social unit. Women were encouraged to care for the family and look after the household, as well as undertake paid employment, placing a double burden on them. By 1960, women had reached 49 percent of the workforce.

With wives in full-time employment, domestic duties were sometimes taken up by other family members. Grandmothers, referred to as *babushki*, undertook some of the burden of housework, childcare or queuing for food. Soviet society had great respect for the elderly, resulting in many multi-generational family units, and this helped reduce the cost to the government of supporting the old and sick.

The Khrushchev years had lessened the strain placed on the family by the increasing provision of social benefits, such as housing, maternity arrangements, health care and childcare. In this sense, the family was much better supported than during the Stalin years. Yet, the inadequacy of this provision put pressure on women to make up the gap, either by providing the care themselves or working for additional family income. The government, aware of the inadequacies of its own social policies, encouraged women to take up this role in supporting the family. Abortion was once again legalised in 1955 in an attempt to reduce financial strain on the family. It continued to be used as a form of contraception.

Changes under developed socialism: the Brezhnev years

The Brezhnev years showed continuity in social policy with those of the Khrushchev era. The government continued to promote the family. What was different was the government's growing awareness of social problems that weakened the family and subsequent attempts to address them. The result was a reinforcement of traditional values, especially concerning divorce, with a new Family Code in 1968.

By the 1970s, threats to the stability of the family were taken seriously by the government.

- The declining rate of population growth put extra pressure on economically productive members of the family to support the old and sick. By 1982, the rate of growth had fallen to just 0.8 percent. Families in cities were usually small in size: in 1970, the average family had 2.4 children, a drop from 2.9 in 1959. The birth rate in Russia and the western republics of the USSR was barely enough to replace the existing population. In those areas, average family sizes had fallen to 1.9 children. The birth rate in the Central Asian republics, where the influence of Islam was strong, was much higher. This relative difference caused concern in the government. In the early 1980s, there were calls to use differentiated family allowances to encourage bigger families in the western republics and the Party leadership discussed the use of 'birth incentives' for inclusion in the 1981 Party Programme. A proposal to give women several years off work after having a child was discussed but not implemented.
- A shortage of adequate housing continued to put a strain on family relationships. Sustained progress in the provision of housing improved the situation and the 1970s saw a trend towards single-family occupancy of apartments and flats. However, overcrowding within flats remained an issue.

- Alcoholism was a significant factor in undermining the family, playing an important role in high levels of domestic abuse and divorce. By 1982, the average Soviet adult was consuming 18 litres of spirits per year, nearly double the figure for 1970. Alcohol was responsible for causing a range of deaths, from cirrhosis of the liver and pancreatitis to being a major contributing factor in heart disease, road deaths and suicide. Historian Nemtsov has concluded that the effects of alcohol played a role in over a quarter of all deaths in the early 1980s. The government seemed unable, and often unwilling, to deal with this social problem. Health campaigns warned the population of the dangers of abusing alcohol, but whatever the shops were short of, it was rarely cheap vodka.
- Divorce rates remained high, with over a third of all marriages ending in divorce. This was often a consequence of alcoholism, and much of the strain placed on families was through the lack of a father figure within the household. The Second World War had been responsible for many young men growing up fatherless in the 1950s. This generation lacked role models when it was their turn to set up a family. Sociologists see this as a key factor in explaining the continuing high rate of divorce in the Soviet Union as well as explaining the high levels of alcoholism and suicide. In an effort to combat marriages arranged in haste, the Family Code of 1968 required couples to give 1 month's notice before a wedding could take place. This period of notice could be extended if the registrar suspected the marriage was arranged to secure a residency permit. Restrictions were placed on divorce, making it illegal to divorce a woman who was pregnant or within the year of the birth of a child.

SOURCE 6 From an interview with Nadezhda Pavlova, a mother studying at Moscow University. She is speaking in 1983.

> My husband and I had a lot of discussion about child rearing. Not about our own children, because it was obvious all along that they were going to go to day-care centres, but about the problem in general: the woman, the community, the children. In the Soviet Union, we're falling behind where the care of small children is concerned. Not in theory – our principles are fine – but in practice things are below par. The nurseries at present don't provide the stimulus to develop that they should provide. But for a woman to stay at home is no solution – she may end up staying at home for good... Women without education used to accept staying at home with the children – but no longer.

Attempts by the Soviet government to replace the traditional family unit with a collective approach to the provision of social support failed. This was due in large part to the inadequacies of the government's social policies, but also to a recognition that the support mechanisms provided by the family acted as a major force for social stability. Stalin's 'Great Retreat' of 1936 was part of this recognition; thereafter the Soviet government opted for measures that supported the traditional family rather than replacing it with a revolutionary alternative.

Social policy under Brezhnev was largely a continuation of that of Khrushchev. The biggest change was in the growing seriousness of the social problems that were, in part, a consequence of these policies and which the government seemed unable to resolve.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

The changing role of the family

What were the key features of government attitudes to the family before and after 1936?

THINKING HISTORICALLY Change (5b)

Impetus and disruption

Youth groups set up to attack 'the tyranny of parents' (1918)	Alexandra Kollontai calls for 'free love' (1918)	Unregistered marriages given status of registered marriages in 1927
The Family Code of 1918	'Postcard divorces' introduced 1926	Social disruption caused by Five-Year Plans 1928–37
The Cultural Revolution launched 1928	The Cultural Revolution brought to an end 1932	Attacks on the Russian Orthodox Church increase 1928

Patterns of development consist of changes that at given times converge and have a bearing on one another and, at other times, diverge and have little in common. In the above example, the changes come together to form a pattern of development that tends towards a key change in social policy.

Group work

Write each change on a small piece of paper and arrange them on a large A3 piece of paper as you think best. Then link them with lines and write along the line what it is that links those changes. Try to make sure that you think about how those links may have changed over time.

Answer the following questions individually or in pairs:

1 Why is 1918 an important year in social policy?

2 Which changes were significant in raising concerns about social developments in the years up to 1936?

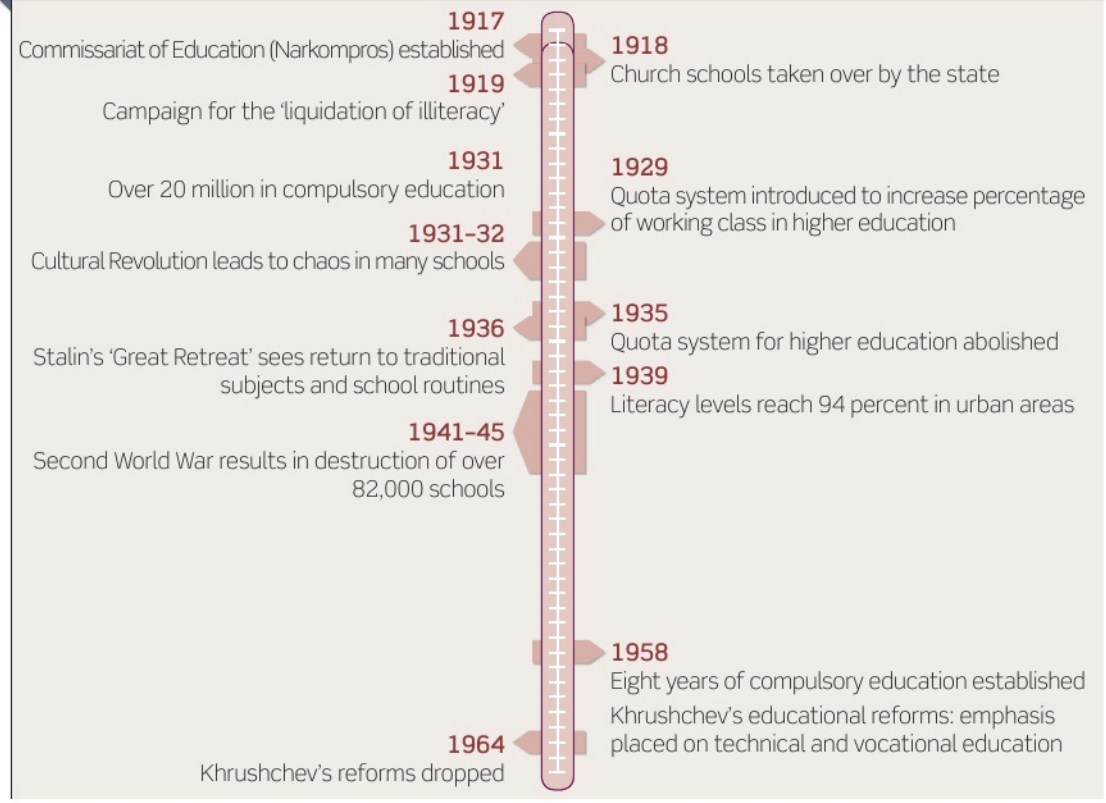
3 What changes were important in drawing Stalin into changing social policy?

4 Which development represents a divergence from the general pattern in the 1930s?

HOW SUCCESSFUL WAS THE SOVIET GOVERNMENT'S ATTEMPTS TO IMPROVE THE PROVISION OF EDUCATION?

Education is often seen as one of the great successes of Soviet social policy: historians have highlighted the enormous expansion of educational provision at all levels and the reduction in illiteracy. Much of this success was achieved in spite of a lack of resources. The Soviet government attached a great deal of significance to education as a transformative force in society and as a method of instilling socialist values and attitudes into the general population from an early age. With the entire educational system in the hands of the state, the Party could exercise control over the curriculum for its own advantage.

TIMELINE OF EDUCATIONAL POLICY



The growth of primary, secondary and higher education

Education in Tsarist Russia had been largely limited to the rich, especially at secondary and university level. Technical schools aimed at the children of the middle class were small in number and confined to the larger cities. At primary level, many schools were provided by the Russian Orthodox Church and there were several thousand peasant-run schools, but for many children school was not considered an important part of their life. The Tsarist government never made school attendance compulsory and many of those who did attend school dropped out before completing four years. In rural areas, 88 percent of children failed to complete primary education. In this context, the progress made by the Soviet government was all the more impressive.

The expansion of compulsory education

- **Under Lunachevsky**
  In 1917, control of education was given to the Commissariat of Education (*Narkompros*), headed by Anatoly Lunachevsky, and the Bolsheviks launched an ambitious programme to provide free, universal and compulsory education for all children aged 7 to 17, with a simultaneous expansion in higher education. In 1918, existing church schools were taken over by the government and education at primary and secondary level was based on the comprehensive model: schools took children of all abilities and all received the same education, at least until the last few years of secondary level provision.

The aim of universal compulsory education did not materialise during Lunachevsky's lifetime due to the lack of resources caused by the civil war of 1918–21. *Narkompros* could only supply one pencil for every 60 students. Shortages left students using pieces of coal to write with. Teachers were poorly paid and often expected to teach classes of 40 or more as well as devote unpaid time to cleaning the school. Conditions were not conducive to a good educational experience and drop-out rates were very high. In 1926, the average child had only attended school for 2.77 years.

- **During the 1930s**
  The goal of providing universal compulsory education was largely achieved, particularly in urban areas. The number of children in education increased from 14 million in 1929 to over 20 million in 1931. Nonetheless, most school children failed to continue their education beyond the first two years of secondary education. The 1930s saw access to education extended to children of 'alien social elements', that is, those whose parents were from the aristocracy, bourgeoisie or 'enemies of the people'. The standard of teaching in rural areas rose during the 1930s as schools benefited from the large number of teachers deported to isolated areas during the Great Terror.
- **From 1934**
  The basic pattern of Soviet schooling, which was to exist thereafter, was established. This was a system of general academic schools that provided four years of primary-level education, each year with its own class teacher. This was followed by three years of 'incomplete secondary education', where students were taught by subject teachers. After this period of study, students could stay on for two or three more years of 'complete secondary education' or transfer to a vocational programme. Some students simply left school for work.
- **In the 1980s**
  Changes were sometimes made to this basic structure. The Soviet government turned many general academic schools into specialist schools, for subjects such as mathematics, science or foreign languages and demand for admission to these schools was often very high. These schools were open to boys and girls, although participation by girls tended to decline with age. Children of graduates were most likely to gain places, but bribery was sometimes used by parents to secure places for their children.

The expansion of compulsory education had been impressive, especially given the small base on which it had to build in 1917. However, this expansion was not without its difficulties.

Obstacles to expansion

The intention to expand compulsory education to cover all faced a range of obstacles that limited the best intentions of the government.

The key obstacle was a lack of resources.

- In the 1920s, this was largely a consequence of the impact of the civil war, but it remained a limiting factor thereafter. Under the NEP, state spending on schools declined and the numbers attending school shrank, only recovering at the end of the 1920s. The lack of resources meant that many schools closed during the winter because there was no heating. It was not only economic resources that were in short supply.
- Low wages discouraged many people from entering the teaching profession, as did the low status attached to teachers in the 1920s. Rural schools were especially affected by a lack of teachers, poor teaching and inadequate facilities.
- School transport was underfunded and, until 1965, the cost had to be borne by parents.
- In 1940, tuition fees, albeit low, had been introduced for the last years of secondary education. These fees were withdrawn in 1956, after which no fees were required to attend either primary or secondary education. However, parents were expected to pay for textbooks, individual equipment and uniforms. For poor rural families, these costs could force children to leave school before the final years of secondary education.
- Resources were also severely stretched by the impact of the Second World War. A large number of teachers were killed in action, and 82,000 schools were physically destroyed in the fighting. Post-war recovery was difficult. Many schools worked a two- or even three-shift day to cope with the lack of classrooms.

- By 1951, the government felt able to move forward with further expansion. The Fifth Five-Year Plan (1951–55) set a target of implementing a ten-year compulsory education for urban schools by 1955 and rural schools by 1960. This proved to be over-optimistic and, after 1958, schools delivered an eight-year programme of compulsory education (ages 7 to 15), after which students could choose to attend a further two years of academic education, transfer to a vocational college or go directly into the workplace.

Traditional attitudes towards the importance of education were often hard to overcome. Attendance at rural schools was often problematic, especially at harvest time. Khrushchev was concerned about the different levels of education experienced by rural children compared with those who lived in towns and implemented a programme of affirmative action. This involved collective farmers being sent to colleges for specialised education and reserving college places for those who had two years of work experience on collectives. These policies failed to have much impact before they were withdrawn after Khrushchev's dismissal in 1964. Even when competing for places at colleges specialising in agricultural sciences, students from a rural background remained at a disadvantage. Two-thirds of students came from urban schools and possessed good academic qualifications. Rural customs remained difficult to break: in 1981, a head teacher from a school in Kirghizstan complained in *Pravda* that his students never turned up for the new school term until November.

Cultural influences also played a part in limiting the expansion of education. State education was viewed by many from the ethnic minorities as a vehicle for **Russification**. All schoolchildren had to learn Russian, even if other subjects were taught in the ethnic language of the region. Teachers were usually Russian and were often regarded with suspicion by minority communities. In Muslim areas, women teachers commanded very little respect. Cultural attitudes also limited the number of Muslim women entering the higher levels of secondary education. In the Uzbek Republic in 1955, girls made up only 26 percent of the school population in the final two years of secondary education.

KEY TERM

Russification
The policy of imposing Russian language and culture on the ethnic minorities of the USSR in order to provide a greater sense of unity throughout the country.

Actions by the government in areas of policy other than education could have a negative impact on schooling. The forced collectivisation of agriculture after 1928 removed many teachers from village schools. They were often seen as elements of the 'old world' to be swept away in the name of socialist progress. Many were labelled as kulaks and deported to labour camps. This trend was accelerated during the chaos caused by the Cultural Revolution of 1931–32. Education in many rural areas was brought to a standstill as attacks on 'bourgeois' elements saw many teachers removed from schools. Students keen to see the back of unpopular teachers informed on them to Party officials. The result was that some schools ended up with no teachers at all.

Attempts to expand education, especially at secondary level, were aimed at helping the creation of a classless society, but changes were often limited or influenced by a Soviet elite, which preferred a system that separated their children from those of the masses. An academic education (rather than a technical or vocational one) that involved the completion of secondary schooling remained the desired route for those who wished their children to better themselves. This academic route may have been open to all, but the reality was that it remained dominated by the children of a white-collar and managerial elite.

Adult education

When the Bolsheviks took power they were aware that they were dealing with a population where most adults had not received a secondary education. Therefore, the government recognised that there was a need to address the educational needs of its adults as well as its children. Short courses were offered to teach adults basic literacy and numeracy, and evening classes were offered to those in work.

Khrushchev's background as a former **rabfak** student made him appreciate the importance of providing opportunities for those who had dropped out of education at an early age. Under his leadership, there was an expansion in opportunities to enable others to return to education as part-time or correspondence students. By 1964, over two million were attending such courses.

By the 1970s, adults could continue their education through an extensive programme of adult education. Diplomas and degrees were offered by vocational colleges and provided a useful strategy for updating workers' skills as well as offering a route to higher education for those who had dropped out of secondary school early. By the 1980s, such courses were sometimes supported by television and radio programmes. These courses were usually studied part-time in the evenings, which put additional demands on the worker. Correspondence courses were also popular, again a sign that many saw education as a way of securing a more fulfilling job and improving their status.

KEY TERM

Rabfak
Schools set up after the Bolshevik Revolution to teach basic literacy and numeracy to those who had dropped out of education.

The expansion of higher education

Under the Tsarist regime higher education was the preserve of the rich, and the numbers attending university were very small. After 1917, *Narkompros* declared that universities should be open to all and courses were laid on to prepare those without formal qualifications for university study. This programme was resisted by the universities so the government then took control of higher education, appointing a Communist rector for each institution. This move was designed to ensure equality of access to higher education.

In the Soviet era, higher education consisted of two main branches: universities that delivered academic and theoretical courses and specialist institutes and colleges of higher education, which taught applied subjects, such as education, engineering and agriculture. In 1929, the government attempted to widen participation in higher education by dropping requirements for entry and they introduced a quota system, whereby 70 percent of places in higher education had to be allocated to those of working-class origin. This figure was only reached once and attempts to meet it led to a drop-out rate of 70 percent, as many students failed to finish courses for which they were ill-prepared. This system was abolished in 1935. The end of the quota system put the emphasis in higher education back on quality rather than quantity, and as the percentage of working-class students fell, the intelligentsia benefited. Despite the return to a more traditional approach in education after 1935, there were some lasting changes. Opportunities for students from working-class backgrounds remained better than they were before 1928.

The expansion of higher-education institutions specialising in technical subjects, which occurred during the Khrushchev era, helped to widen participation. In 1964, half a million were studying in higher education on a part-time basis. The establishment of many new higher-education colleges specialising in technical subjects helped this process, even if their status in relation to the more academic universities remained low. Khrushchev's requirement that all graduates spend two years working in a position directed by the government 'to meet the nation's needs' was unpopular and was dropped after 1964.

The overall number of students in higher education continued to rise during the Soviet period (see Figure 4.1).

This enormous expansion was helped by the provision of free tuition – with a short exception from 1940 to 1956 – and a system of grants to support students' living costs. However, grants were low and could be withdrawn for poor performance in exams. Most students worked part-time while in higher education to cover living expenses.

The Soviet government envisaged an education system that would provide opportunities for all in a classless society. It had certainly achieved its goal of mass participation in education. By the early 1980s, one-third of Soviet citizens were involved in some form of education. The reality of the nature of participation by different groups at the differing levels of education, however, indicated that Soviet education was reinforcing social distinctions rather than helping them to wither away.

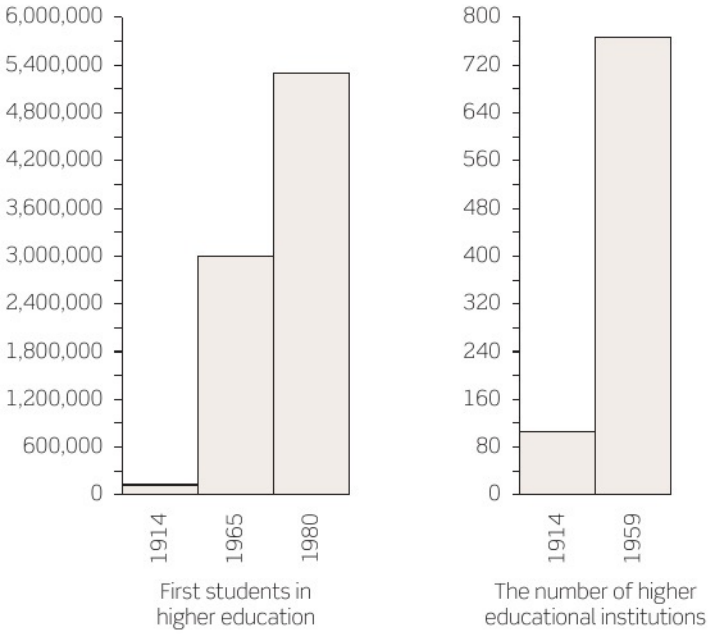


Figure 4.1 The expansion in higher education in the USSR.

The reduction of illiteracy

One of the great successes of Soviet education was the elimination of illiteracy. Seen as a basic requirement for citizens in the modern world, literacy was given great importance by the Communist regime.

In the last years of Tsarist Russia the illiteracy rate was about 65 percent, which accounts for the Bolshevik emphasis on visual propaganda in its early years. In 1919, the Bolsheviks launched a campaign to bring about 'the liquidation of illiteracy'. The initial aim was to make all Soviet citizens aged between 8 and 50 literate. The Party saw this as necessary to ensure modern technical skills could be taught and learnt as well as opening up the population to a wider range of communist propaganda. Literacy would also help loosen the hold of religion and superstition over the rural population.

Methods used to reduce illiteracy included.

- Tens of thousands of 'liquidation points' were set up in towns and rural areas, where people could undertake basic literacy courses. Between 1920 and 1926, five million people completed these courses.
- Remedial schools, called *rabfaki*, were set up for workers who had left school without basic literacy and numeracy skills. These were usually located at factories and millions attended.
- The Red Army played a key role in the campaign. All soldiers recruited into the army had to attend literacy classes as part of their service.
- A Literacy League was established to promote literacy, complete with its own magazine *Down with Illiteracy!*
- Particular emphasis was placed on women, who were much more likely to be illiterate, especially in the Muslim areas of Central Asia. 14 million of the 17 million who were illiterate in 1917 were women. Courses for women were provided by the Party's women's organisation, Zhenotel.

By 1939, literacy rates had improved markedly. The census for that year put literacy rates at 94 percent for the urban population and 86 percent for that of the countryside. This was achieved despite the tumultuous upheavals of the 1930s. By 1959, these figures had improved to 99 and 98 percent, respectively. Official statistics may overstate the levels of literacy, but there is no doubt that the government had achieved a remarkable success.

State control of the curriculum

As an instrument of social control and propaganda, the content of the curriculum was to be of immense importance to the Soviet government. Education could play a vital role in the transformation of society and its values and attitudes. To ensure this, the government quickly asserted control over the curriculum to suit its purpose.

The purpose of the curriculum

- Education would play a key role in instilling socialist values and attitudes into the population. It would help to create the 'new socialist man' – and woman. Propaganda could be conveyed to children at an early age to support the indoctrination of socialist ideas into young minds. Education would therefore secure support for the continued existence of the communist regime and be an important factor in providing social stability.
- Soviet education would act as a vehicle to attack traditional practices and beliefs. This included reducing the hold of religion and superstition over the population. It could also act as an attack on patriarchal attitudes and help the position and status of women.
- Education would be an important method of Russification, bringing a sense of unity to the differing ethnic groups that made up the Soviet Union.
- With a concerted policy of industrialisation in the 1930s, education would enable the population to acquire the technical skills and expertise needed in a modern economy. Care was taken to match the growth of secondary education in the 1930s to the needs of the Five-Year Plans. In the period 1945 to 1985, the need to match the technological developments of the West necessitated a constant updating of skills. Under Khrushchev, there was an increased emphasis on the development of technological knowledge and skills.

From early radicalism to Stalin's 'Great Retreat'

As in other policy areas, the early years of communist rule were marked by a naive radicalism that had an impact on schools. Education was heavily influenced by those who wished to use schools as miniature copies of socialist society. The principle of single schools for all ages and abilities was established despite some in the Party who wished to set up separate technical schools to help match the needs of the developing economy.

Within schools, teaching was to be delivered according to progressive methods that emphasised discovery, play and group work. Children would study themes, such as farming or nature, rather than traditional subjects. Tests were abolished and corporal punishment forbidden. Classrooms were renamed 'laboratories of learning' and children were to have an influential voice in the running of their schools.

These changes met with opposition from parents who saw an academic education with formal qualifications as the key to brighter prospects for their children. The authority of teachers declined dramatically, some were dismissed by their own classes and some schools fell into chaos. Many teachers merely ignored government orders and stuck to their traditional method of lecturing students.

The chaotic situation in education grew worse during the Cultural Revolution of 1931–32 and the government became concerned enough to impose order over the school system. As in other areas of social policy, Stalin's 'Great Retreat' of 1936 led to the imposition of more traditional measures.

- The new system was based on Anton Makarenko's *Pedagogical Poem* (1933–36), which stressed traditional discipline to ensure individuals knew their duty to the collective.
- Textbooks were prescribed by the government, and traditional subjects and formal examinations were reintroduced.
- Authority within the school was returned to the teachers and teaching methods were based on lectures that required mechanical learning of information.
- In a symbolic move that emphasised tradition, compulsory pigtails for schoolgirls were required.

The content of the curriculum

From Stalin's 'Great Retreat' of 1936 onwards, the Soviet curriculum was based on traditional subjects. All students, whatever their ability, studied the same curriculum until the last years of secondary education. Subjects were delivered by teachers who had been trained by the government, using approved textbooks. Information had to be memorised and then regurgitated for examinations. Creativity and free thinking were not encouraged, even at kindergarten level (see Source 7).

SOURCE 7 An account of a Soviet kindergarten in Moscow during the 1970s.

> Kindergarteners were encouraged to produce 'creative' work as identical as possible to all other children's artwork. In one kindergarten, for example, when the children drew daisies, the flowers were placed identically on their paper, with the same number of petals, in the same colours and with the same three leaves on the stem... Copied from models, the pictures were unusually precise for three-year-olds. Once a month, however, the tots were allowed to draw whatever their hearts desired.

Among the subjects studied were the following.

- Russian Literature, which involved the study of 19th-century classics. Schools usually offered one modern foreign language, with English being the most popular.
- Particular attention was placed on mathematics and science. All subjects were influenced by the political agenda, but science during the Stalin period was badly affected by the ideas of Trofim Lysenko. His ideas on plant genetics were favoured by Stalin and became the accepted scientific truth, despite the fact that they were wrong. Those teachers or scientists who pointed this out risked deportation to the Gulag.

EXTEND YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Lysenkoism

Based on the ideas of Trofim Lysenko, a self-proclaimed agricultural expert. Lysenko did not accept the science of genetics. Instead he believed in the principle of acquired characteristics through environment. For example, if all leaves were stripped from a plant its seeds would produce leafless plants. His ideas were not based on scientific research or fact. Lysenko's advantage was that he seemed to be able to suggest quick solutions to agricultural problems and his proletarian background made him a favourite of Stalin. Most Soviet scientists were highly educated and from a relatively wealthy background. Thus, when scientists suggested caution when implementing new agricultural methods, they could be criticised as bourgeois experts, intent on sabotaging Soviet progress. Lysenko gained enormous influence under Stalin and in 1948 it was declared illegal to criticise Lysenko's ideas. Most Soviet scientists knew that Lysenko's theories were wrong, but they faced arrest if they spoke out. The result was that Soviet science, especially in the field of biology, was held back for decades. Lysenko's ideas only fell out of favour in the USSR during the mid-1960s. Under Stalin, the only field of science where critics of Lysenko's theories were allowed was in nuclear physics. Stalin was not stupid!

- History became a political minefield and required Stalin's personal intervention before the standard history book could be agreed. The result was the publication of the *History of the All-Union Communist Party* in 1938. The book presented the official view of developments under Stalin and was to be used for teaching purposes. The Short Course, as it became known, was required reading and a whole generation of Soviet citizens was educated into its views. History exams had to be cancelled in 1956 in the light of Khrushchev's revelations about Stalin. His de-Stalinisation policy led to a hurried rewriting of history and, as the historian Westwood has stated, students noticed 'the difficulties of their history teachers … when it was impossible to foresee what, tomorrow, would happen to yesterday'. A committee of historians led by Boris Ponomaryov was appointed to prepare a new text. The new official *History of the Communist Party*, published in 1959, accused Stalin of economic mistakes and 'errors' and systematically removed Stalin's name from any favourable connection – credit was given to the Party and the people instead.
- During the Brezhnev years, Stalin was simply ignored in the history books produced in the USSR. It was as if Stalin, and the famine of 1932 and the Gulag, had not existed.

EXTRACT 1 This viewpoint was presented in the *History of the USSR* (1981) by Y. Kukushkin who stated:

> … as time went by, all the achievements in socialist construction were erroneously credited to him (Stalin) and his personal leadership. This was a mistake as the crucial part played by the Soviet people and the Communist Party, the two decisive forces in the building of a new society, was thus relegated to the background.

- The use of the Russian language was also to raise controversy. All students across the Soviet Union were required to learn Russian and this was vital for promotion. For those who belonged to one of the many ethnic minorities, most other lessons would be in their native language, although works of literature in their native language were rarely taught for fear of encouraging the development of nationalist sentiment. Schools that taught in the Russian language were generally viewed as offering a better education and non-Russian parents often chose them for their children. Russian speakers in the non-Russian republics of the Soviet Union were resistant to learning other native languages and special arrangements were introduced under Khrushchev that dropped this requirement.
- The emphasis given to technical and vocational education increased with Khrushchev's educational reforms of 1958. All schools were required to provide vocational training or allow students to transfer to colleges that offered such provision. Undertaking 'productive economic work' became a requirement of going to university. One of Khrushchev's aims with these reforms was to bring the educated into closer touch with real life. This may have been a laudable aim, but it was unpopular with those students and their parents who wished to pursue a more academic education, and the reforms were dropped when Brezhnev became leader. Thereafter, work experience was expected to take place within the school workshop or garden.
- The element of the curriculum that was most obviously indoctrination was the study of Marxist-Leninist Theory. This course was compulsory at all levels of compulsory education and in higher education too. Surveys of students from the 1980s reveal that, for many, this was the most boring part of the curriculum, but there was an acceptance that it had to be studied and exams passed to secure further progress in their chosen field. Even those at kindergarten were not neglected. Here, there would be posters and little shrines of 'Uncle Lenin' – 'Uncle Stalin' disappeared after 1956. Children were encouraged to place ribbons around a small bust of Lenin.

Unlike most educational systems of the time, there was no difference between what was offered to boys and girls. The only exception to this was during the Second World War, when the government tried to move to a system of separate schools for boys and girls. Boys were to be given basic military training, while girls had lessons in nursing. The policy was only ever partly applied before reverting back to a policy of co-educational schools in 1954.

Since 1936, Stalin's restoration of traditional school systems had placed authority for school discipline back with the teacher, yet the students were also given a role. Each class had a representative, usually elected by the students, whose job was to inform the teacher of any misbehaviour by members of the class. They also had a role in arranging for brighter students to help those who were falling behind with their school work. It was a system that reinforced the duties of the students to socialism and the state.

The degree of change in education 1953–85

The system of Soviet education was well established by the 1950s. Thereafter, changes to the system were minor. The main attempt to bring a different emphasis to the system was that of Khrushchev's reforms of 1958–59. His attempts to expand higher and adult education for the children of workers and place greater emphasis on technical and vocational education faced opposition from the Party, who saw them as restricting the availability of an academic

SOURCE 8 A parade of schoolchildren in the Pioneers youth organisation, in Red Square, Moscow in 1972.



education for the children of the Party elite. As a result, Brezhnev dropped the most controversial changes and the high-status, academic route remained the preferred path into higher education. Like many of Brezhnev's policies, the interests of the Party took priority over those of the state. Nonetheless, concerns remained that education needed to keep pace with the skills needed to match technological advances in the economy. Investment in higher and adult education continued.

SOURCE 9 From an interview with 'Sonya', a young mother living in Moscow. She was speaking in 1983.

> You know our system is antiquated. They don't beat us the way they did under the tsars, but otherwise nothing has changed. The system forces us to learn by rote, to study without understanding. It's very seldom that a teacher tries to arouse the students' interest in anything. Everyone is required to learn the same thing and think in the same way. And the hysteria over marks is horrible. Even seven- and eight-year-olds strive for high marks, and many are beaten if they come home with D's and F's.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

Soviet schools

Look at Source 9. Why, despite criticisms of its nature, did Soviet parents take education so seriously?

Youth groups and informal education

Alongside school, young Soviet citizens had the ideas and attitudes of the Party reinforced through the informal education they received as members of the Party's youth groups. The Party had a three-tier structure to cover all ages.

Octobrists were for children aged five to nine and were organised informal gatherings, where nursery rhymes were learnt and simple games could be played.

The Pioneers covered children from the ages of 10 to 14. Most children joined the Pioneers, undergoing an initiation ceremony at school or in a purpose-built Pioneers' Palace. Members had to promise to love their country and follow the teachings of Lenin and the Communist Party. Only members were allowed to wear the uniform, red neckerchief and badge of the Pioneers. The Pioneers encouraged good behaviour in school but also provided activities that extended the range of opportunities offered. This was particularly true in the provision of sport, drama and other leisure activities, and this went some way to explaining the appeal of the organisation.

For those aged 14–28 there was Komsomol, the Young Communist League. This was an altogether more serious group and was seen as essential for progress into the Communist Party itself. Stalin had made use of the enthusiasm and dedication to socialism of Komsomol members to help carry through key changes. Komsomol volunteers had been called upon to build new industrial centres during the first three Five-Year Plans; they were at the forefront of the Cultural Revolution, taking an important role in rooting out class enemies. The organisation grew from 2.3 million members in 1929 to 10.2 million in 1940. In the 1950s, Khrushchev would call on Komsomol members to provide volunteers for his Virgin Lands Scheme.

By the 1980s, activists in Komsomol were expected to support community schemes, which might involve clearing overgrown vegetation from public places or supporting Party campaigns to raise awareness of social issues. They were sometimes used to report on 'deviant' behaviour by youths who listened to foreign music or engaged in vandalism; on occasions, Komsomol were called upon to physically break up gatherings of young people listening to unapproved music or poetry. These tasks did not inspire much enthusiasm in Komsomol members, but membership of the organisation continued to grow. By 1982, it had soared to over 40 million, a sign that many saw Komsomol as a route to career success.

All aspects of the curriculum were controlled by the state: the subjects delivered, the materials and textbooks used, and the training of the teachers who delivered the curriculum. The emphasis on socialist values and duty to the state were instilled from an early age. The rigorous approach to memorising knowledge did not suit students who wished to be creative or think for themselves, and although most students accepted the system as it was, levels of frustration and disenchantment with the system increased with the age of the students. Academic standards in the humanities and social sciences often suffered because of these restrictions, but from the Academy of Sciences emerged the largest scientific-technological intelligentsia in the world during the 1970s. Eight Soviet scientists were awarded Nobel prizes for science.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

Soviet educational policy

1 List the successes of Soviet educational policy.

2 What criticisms can be made of Soviet educational policy?

3 Explain how educational provision helped provide social stability for the Soviet government.

ACTIVITY
SUMMARY

Soviet social policy

What were similarities between the following aspects of Soviet social policy: social security provision, women and the family and education?

Think about the following: aims; changes through time; factors limiting change; results.

AS Level Exam-Style Question Section B

How accurate is it to say that government education policy succeeded in improving the lives of people in the USSR in the years 1917–85? (20 marks)

Tip

Think about evidence you could use to support the argument that education policy did improve the lives of the Soviet people. What evidence could you use to argue their lives did not improve? Think about whether education policy served the interests of the state and Party rather than the people.

A Level Exam-Style Question Section B

To what extent was social policy successful at providing social stability in the Soviet Union between 1953 and 1985? (20 marks)

Tip

This question requires you to assess whether or not social policy provided social stability. You will need to explain how each aspect of social policy (social security, women and the family and education) created a degree of stability and assess the level of stability achieved. Was stability assured or superficial?

EXTRACT 2 An interpretation of social stability in the Soviet Union by G. Hosking, from *A History of the Soviet Union* (published in 1992).

By the mid-1960s the society which Stalin had created in embryo had become fully formed. It was a very hierarchical, stable and conservative society, especially now that the upheavals occasioned by purges, war urbanisation and rapid social mobility were receding into the past... it was in effect one single vast organisation, directed by the cadres of the party-state apparatus, with their own headquarters in the Central Committee of the Communist Party and its permanent departments, all situated in one building on Old Square in Moscow. Through the by now highly developed and sophisticated nomenklatura system of patronage, this Central Committee supervised in principle every single appointment of any importance in any walk of life...

Brezhnev's watchword was 'trust in cadres', and he put it into practice by making as few changes as possible at the highest levels of party and state...

The result of Brezhnev's policy was to give new stability and confidence to the men at the centre of the nomenklatura network...

EXTRACT 3 An interpretation of social stability by R. Service, from *A History of Twentieth Century Russia* (published in 1997).

... the Politburo was failing to maintain active support in society even at previous levels. It therefore sought to intensify the recruitment of communist party members. In 1966 there had been 12.4 million rank-and-filers; by 1981 this had risen to 17.4 million. Thus nearly one in ten Soviet adults were party members. Their assigned duty was to inspire and mobilise the rest of society. The idea was that the more members, the better the chance to secure universal acquiescence in the status quo. As ever, the result was not a compact political vanguard but a party which reflected the diverse problems of broad social groups. Politburo leaders contrived to overlook the problem. For them, the dangers of further change outweighed the risks of keeping things as they were. Indeed the contemplation of change would have required a concentration of intellectual faculties that hardly any of them any longer possessed.

THINKING HISTORICALLY Interpretations (3a)

Differing accounts

Carefully read Extracts 2 and 3, which give two historical interpretations of social stability in the Soviet Union during the Brezhnev era, before completing the activities that follow.

1 For each of the historians create a summary table of their views.

a) Make a note of how they address the key issues outlined in the table below.

b) Make a note of the evidence they give in support of this claim.

c) Use your notes and knowledge to give evidence that supports or challenges their interpretation.

HISTORIAN:_____	Interpretation of the issue	Evidence given	Evidence which supports or challenges this view
How stable was Soviet society during the Brezhnev era?			
What role did the Party play in society?			
How responsible was Brezhnev for the stability in Soviet society?			

2 In pairs discuss which historian's interpretation of social stability during the Brezhnev era seems to best fit with the available evidence. Which seems the most convincing?

3 Make a note of any issues that made it difficult to compare the two interpretations directly.

4 Challenge: Seek out another historical interpretation of social stability during the Brezhnev era and compare this to the views you have explored already.

THINKING HISTORICALLY Causation (3a&b)

The might of human agency

1 'Our lack of control.' Work in pairs.

Describe to your partner a situation where things did not work out as you had intended. Then explain how you would have done things differently to make the situation as you would have wanted. Your partner will then tell the group about that situation and ask whether they think that your alternative actions would have had the desired effect.

2 'The Tyranny of failed actions.' Work individually to consider Khrushchev's attempts to promote technical and vocational education in 1958.

a) Write down three ways that Khrushchev could have acted differently in that situation.

b) Now imagine that you are Khrushchev. Write a defence of your actions. Try to think about the things that you would have known about at the time and make sure you do not use the benefit of hindsight.

3 'Arguments.' Work in groups of between four and six.

In turn, each group member will read out their defence. Other group members suggest ways to reassure the reader that they were not a failure and that, in some ways, what happened was a good outcome.

4 Think about the Soviet government's decision to use women in the war effort in 1941.

a) In what ways were the consequences of this decision not anticipated by the government?

b) In what ways did the decision turn out better for the government than their intended consequences?

5 Think about Alexandra Kollontai and the Family Code of 1918.

a) In what ways were the consequences of the Family Code not anticipated by Kollontai?

b) In what ways did the Family Code turn out worse for Kollontai than the intended consequences?

6 To what extent are historical individuals in control of the history they helped to create? Explain your answer with reference to specific historical examples from this topic and others you have studied.

WIDER READING

Andrle, V. *A Social History of Twentieth-Century Russia*, Hodder (1994)

Eaton, K. *Daily Life in the Soviet Union*, Greenwood (2004)

Figes, O. *The Whisperers*, Penguin (2007)

Freeze, G. *Russia, A History*, Oxford University Press (2009)

Hosking, G. *A History of the Soviet Union*, Fontana (1992)

Suny, R. *The Soviet Experiment*, Oxford (1998)

Suny, R. *The Structure of Soviet History*, Oxford University Press (2003)

Thompson, W. *The Soviet Union under Brezhnev*, Pearson (2003)

1.5 What explains the fall of the USSR, c1985–91?

KEY QUESTIONS

- How important were economic weaknesses in bringing about the fall of the USSR?
- How significant were the failures of Gorbachev's political reforms?
- What impact did the resurgence of nationalism have on the collapse of the USSR?
- How far were Gorbachev and Yeltsin responsible for the collapse of the USSR?

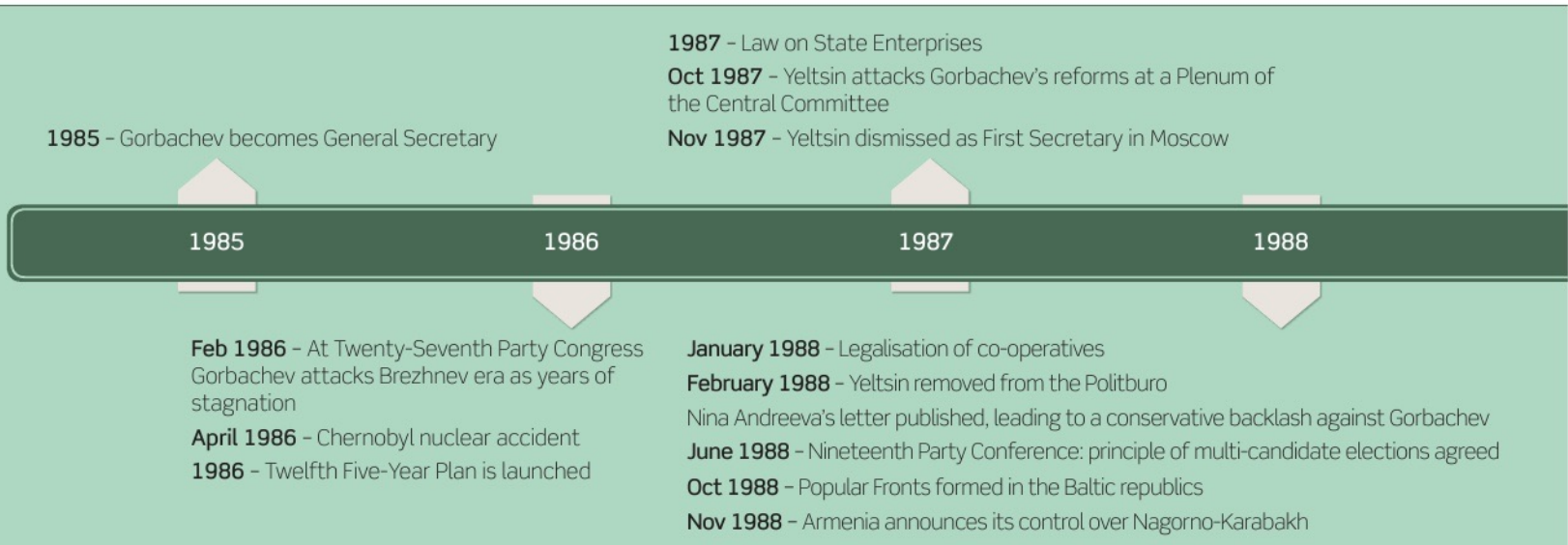
INTRODUCTION

Despite its economic weaknesses, most commentators in 1985 would have considered the collapse of the Soviet Union unlikely. But by the end of 1991, the Soviet Union had collapsed. It was an event that took most people by surprise.

In 1985, Mikhail Gorbachev had been elected General Secretary of the Communist Party. It was an event that seemed to offer the communist regime a chance of revival and renewed strength. This was due to Gorbachev's programme of reform. Yet within a few years, the economic and political reform undertaken by Gorbachev had seriously weakened the capacity of the Communist Party to hold on to power. A resurgence in the forces of nationalism in Eastern Europe produced a renewed awareness of national identity within the various national groups within the USSR. The hold of the central government over the Soviet republics weakened, producing a power play between the Soviet leader, Gorbachev, and the politician most identified with a resurgent Russian nationalism, Boris Yeltsin. An attempted coup by conservatives in the Party in August 1991 seriously undermined Gorbachev's position as Soviet leader. When the coup collapsed, Gorbachev was back in power but no longer in control of events. Gorbachev tried to rescue the Soviet Union by seeking agreement for his new Union Treaty, but political power had drained away from the centre to the leaders of each republic within the USSR. With Russia as the largest republic by far, it was their President, Yeltsin, who was now able to steer events. In December 1991, the republics dissolved the Soviet Union as a sovereign state. On Christmas day, Gorbachev gave a farewell message in a televised broadcast and left the Kremlin for good.

Since 1991, the sudden collapse of the Soviet Union has fascinated historians, leading to a range of interpretations of the event. Interpretations of the fall of the Soviet Union face two key difficulties:

- The events are still fairly recent and too bound up with current affairs to enable a clear path through competing viewpoints.
- The question of *why* the Soviet Union collapsed is a highly complicated one. Historians have provided detailed accounts of *how* it collapsed but still struggle to explain convincingly *why* it did so. It is difficult to pinpoint any group who wished to bring about its collapse, with the exception of nationalists in the Baltic republics.



The suddenness of the collapse suggests that short-term factors played the dominant role, but it would seem that any one of these need not have been catastrophic for the USSR. It was the combination of these factors working together that produced the process of unravelling that broke the Soviet system. The links between these factors and their relative importance have formed the main focus of debate between historians.



Figure 5.1 The 15 republics of the USSR in 1985.

March 1989 – Elections to Congress of People's Deputies
April 1989 – Demonstrations in Tbilisi, Georgia
May 1989 – Gorbachev elected Chairman of the Supreme Soviet

March 1990 – Article 6 repealed: way opened for new political parties to be established
March 1990 – Lithuania proclaims independence from the USSR
July 1990 – Yeltsin resigns from the Communist Party

1989 | 1990 | 1991

October 1989 – 500 Days Programme calls for rapid transition to a market economy
Nov 1989 – Fall of the Berlin Wall

April 1991 – Georgia declares independence
June 1991 – Yeltsin becomes President of Russia
August 1991 – Coup by conservatives in the Party attempts to seize power
Soviet Union recognises independence of the Baltic States
November 1991 – Yeltsin rejects Gorbachev's new Union Treaty
December 1991 – Dissolution of the USSR

EVALUATING INTERPRETATIONS OF HISTORY

Historians are concerned with more than merely describing the course of past events; they aim to explain why events happened. It is at this level that engaging with the past becomes really interesting. Historians approach the past in different ways, often with their own perspective on what drives change forward. Are individuals important in the big scheme of history? Do their intentions and actions shape the course of history? Other historians see individuals as less influential in determining events. Are individuals prisoners of their circumstances with very limited room for manoeuvre? These philosophical debates often underpin the way that historians consider the past.

Although historians may come to a topic with a particular perspective, their aim is to form an interpretation of events that is convincing because it can be supported by evidence. But evidence can be found in a range of forms and with varying degrees of value. This range includes accounts by individuals involved in events and statistical evidence of economic performance. All types of evidence needs to be subjected to the analytical skills of the historian.

The issue of what caused the collapse of the Soviet Union is subject to these issues of interpretation and has generated a range of views. When considering these interpretations, it is important to think about the following features:

- What is the perspective of the historian?
- How does the historian develop their interpretation?
- What evidence does the historian use to support their interpretation?
- Do you find their interpretation valid? Do you accept the judgements they make based on the evidence they use?

It is important to distinguish fact from opinion. There is nothing wrong with opinion – it would be a dull historian who did not have one! But opinions need to be supported and be convincing.

THINKING HISTORICALLY Interpretations (5a)

What I believe is how I see

Below are three descriptions of the perspectives of very famous historians.

Herodotus	Leopold von Ranke	Karl Marx
• His research consisted of conversations • Identified that accounts had to be judged on their merits • Some believe that certain passages in his writing are inventions to complete the narrative	• Believed in an evidence-based approach and relied heavily on primary sources • Desired to find out the 'facts' and discover the connections between them • Stressed the role of the individual in shaping history	• Believed that history would go through stages leading to a state where everybody was equal • Believed that historical changes were ultimately determined by changes to the economy • Often driven by political considerations and looked for evidence to support his point of view

Work in groups of between three and six. Each member or pair will take the perspective of one of the above historians and argue from that perspective. Work through the questions as a group and answer the last one individually.

1 Herodotus did not use written evidence to construct his history. Does this mean that his history is less useful than the others?

2 Ranke based his writing almost exclusively on primary sources from the time he was investigating, rather than secondary sources. How might this affect his ability to see larger patterns in history as opposed to the other two?

3 Marx put his philosophy of history, and perhaps politics, first and research second. Would this make his history weaker than the others?

4 'Colourful' individuals populate the writing of Herodotus and Ranke, while Marx concentrates on the difference between classes. Write three historical questions that each historian might ask.

5 The three historians mentioned above all had different methods and motivations and yet their writing has been valued ever since it was created. Explain how the prior knowledge that we bring to the history that we write does not invalidate it.

HOW IMPORTANT WERE ECONOMIC WEAKNESSES IN BRINGING ABOUT THE FALL OF THE USSR?

The Soviet government had justified its legitimacy to rule by demonstrating its ability to meet the material needs of its people. This principle had become more important with the reduction in terror after 1953: the acquiescence of the population was based on the government ensuring the provision of their material and welfare needs. But this could only be achieved if the Soviet economy performed well enough to deliver these.

Long-term economic weakness

When Gorbachev became General Secretary in 1985, the Soviet economy was in decline. The weaknesses of the Soviet economic system had been highlighted in the Novosibirsk Report of 1983. Compiled by the leading economic sociologist, Tatyana Zaslavskaya, the report drew attention to the growing crisis in agriculture caused by state inefficiency and inflexibility. The report, which was known by its heading 'For internal use only', was distributed to the Politburo, but most of its ageing members did not understand the conclusions of the report or simply chose to ignore them. The exception was Gorbachev, who realised that reform was needed. He was less clear about the solution required. A period of trial and error followed, which ended with the dismantling of the Soviet economic system, and the result was to plunge the economy into disruption and chaos. Without the economic underpinning needed to sustain an improvement in the lives of the population, the Soviet government was placed in a weak and vulnerable position.

Gorbachev's initial economic reforms: discipline and acceleration

Gorbachev's initial steps were cautious and began with the positioning of like-minded reformers into key positions. One of his main rivals in the Politburo, Grigory Romanov, was dismissed in July 1985. Key reformers were brought into the Politburo: Yegor Ligachev and Nikolai Ryzhkov. Boris Yeltsin (the First Secretary of the Party in Moscow) and Alexander Yakovlev (both of whom were leading figures in the push for reform) were promoted to the Central Committee in 1986.

Gorbachev was now ready to launch reforms that would improve the economy. His initial approach echoed that of his mentor, Andropov. There was a campaign to attack the problem of rampant alcoholism. As well as improving the health of the Soviet population, the campaign against alcohol would help improve the productivity of the Soviet workforce. By the mid-1980s, alcohol accounted for 15 percent of all household spending. This was partly explained by the lack of other goods in the shops but, whatever the cause, it had a detrimental effect on the workforce, many of whom regularly turned up to work drunk. As Gorbachev put it in a statement in April 1985, 'We can't build Communism on vodka.'

The government introduced a series of measures to curb drinking: the legal age for the consumption of alcohol was raised to 21; the number of retail outlets where alcohol could be bought was reduced; vineyards were destroyed and distilleries closed. The cost of vodka in the shops tripled. The campaign produced some benefits, at least at first, but the tax revenues that the government gained from alcohol fell markedly and caused a serious shortfall in the budget. Drinking levels started to rise after a while as illegal moonshine liquor was produced in large quantities and often in unhygienic conditions. It soon became clear that relying on the workforce to become more disciplined and sober would not solve the underlying problems of the Soviet economy.

Twelfth Five-Year Plan

The key issue remained of how to improve the level of growth in the economy. The government fell back on the traditional Soviet method of increasing investment, controlled by central planning, to push the economy to greater production. It was hoped that this would accelerate growth in the economy. The focus of investment would be science and research, especially in engineering. This approach was to be implemented through the Twelfth (and last) Five-Year Plan (1986–90). The Plan, like Soviet planning before it, contained key weaknesses.

- Investment in the Soviet Union was heavily skewed towards construction projects, but these had a habit of leading to extra spending which was needed to equip the factories constructed. Therefore these projects tended to lead to overspends and sucked in far more investment than originally intended.
- Soviet industry had become notorious for using equipment that was out of date and prone to breaking down. Old factories relied on old equipment and became increasingly unproductive.
- Soviet industry was slow to use new technology, and imports of foreign technology were a drain on valuable foreign exchange, which was often used to import food.
- The agricultural sector was swallowing vast sums of investment that were not leading to improvements in productivity. The government had reached the point where it realised that there was little to be gained in terms of production growth from diverting additional sums to agriculture.
- The focus remained on quantity rather than quality. The traditional Soviet emphasis on meeting numerical targets meant that the quality was often poor, sometimes so poor the products were unusable.

Thus, Gorbachev's policy of acceleration did little to address the fundamental weaknesses of the Soviet economy. Part of the problem was the level of opposition to any real change and the fact that much of this opposition came from the Party and state economic planning apparatus. In June 1986, Gorbachev admitted, 'Take Gosplan… What they want, they do.'

Under the Twelfth Five-Year Plan, Gorbachev tried to streamline the state apparatus in an attempt to avoid waste through duplication and to cut rivalry by competing interests for available resources. Rather than decentralise economic decision-making, 'superministries' were set up to achieve better co-ordination of economic activity and reduce waste. However, the superministries were unable to bring about these changes.

The chief obstacle to these reforms was the fact that they were to be implemented by the people whose privileged positions the reforms were trying to reduce. Changes to investment priorities also came up against resistance from the military, who were powerful in pushing for new investment in military technology. Industrial and military investment could only be increased if other sectors suffered, and this posed a threat to the government's ability to maintain goods for the general public to consume. The alternative was to **go into deficit**, a short-term remedy that could not be sustained. Between 1985 and 1986, the deficit of the Soviet economy rose from 2.4 percent of GDP to 6.2 percent. Gorbachev's failure to grapple with the underlying economic problems had exacerbated the situation. The problems were not helped by the ongoing war in Afghanistan, which consumed considerable amounts of money, and increased defence spending in light of the USA's plans to develop its **Strategic Defence Initiative** (Star Wars) programme. It was clear that real change would require a much more fundamental reform.

KEY TERMS

Go into deficit
To allow the state to spend more money than it has available. It is a method often used by governments during economic downturns in the hope that the economy will improve soon.

Strategic Defence Initiative
The US programme for the development of anti-ballistic missile systems in space, known by the nickname Star Wars. It was a system that would require vast sums of money and resources to develop, and in order for the USSR to keep pace with this it faced bankruptcy.

EXTEND YOUR KNOWLEDGE

The War in Afghanistan
In December 1979, the Soviet government had launched an invasion into Afghanistan to prop up the pro-Soviet People's Democratic Party who were facing armed resistance from Muslim fundamentalist groups. The invasion marked an end to détente, a period of warmer relations between the USSR and the USA. In response, the USA organised a boycott of the Moscow Olympics of 1980 and ended the SALT arms agreement, which had sought to limit nuclear arms. When Ronald Reagan became US President in 1980, he initiated a more strident, anti-Soviet foreign policy to deter further Soviet aggression, but he did not intervene directly in the war in Afghanistan. The war involved over 100,000 Soviet troops and was costly in terms of lives and money. The war dragged on without success until 1989. It was an unwanted distraction during a period of growing economic and political crisis within the USSR.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

Soviet economic performance, 1985–89
What, according to the figures in Source 1, was the impact on growth rates of Gorbachev's policy of acceleration?

Economic *perestroika*

By 1987, Gorbachev decided that a more fundamental restructuring of the Soviet economy was needed. If the state apparatus was the obstacle to reform, it was better to try and use methods outside of the state. At the January 1987 Plenum of the Central Committee he launched his proposal for economic *perestroika* (restructuring). He hoped that by introducing **market mechanisms** and allowing an element of private enterprise the economy could be revitalised. This would put in place a series of incentives that would encourage production and give greater flexibility than the central command economy in meeting the needs of the population. The key reforms were as follows.

- **The encouragement of joint ventures, January 1987**. The government allowed foreign firms to establish businesses in the Soviet Union, usually in joint enterprises with the state. Moscow got its first McDonald's in 1990. Gorbachev hoped that joint ventures with foreign businesses would open the USSR to more modern technology.
- **The Law on State Enterprises, June 1987**. This allowed a loosening of state controls over wages and prices and, as a consequence, weakened the authority of Gosplan. The law also allowed an element of election in the choice of managers. Factories were given the right to produce what they liked once the targets set by the state had been met.
- **Co-operatives were legalised in 1988**. This allowed small-scale private enterprises to be established. These businesses could set their own prices. The result was that a flourishing sector in cafes, restaurants and small shops quickly developed. The use of the term 'co-operatives' appealed to more conservative elements in the Party, who feared the dismantling of socialism. Gorbachev was thus able to partly disguise the move to a more market-based economy.

KEY TERM

Market mechanism
Using the practices of a capitalist economy, such as the forces of supply and demand of goods to determine prices rather than the state.

SOURCE 1 Soviet economic growth rates by percent, compiled by A. Nove (1992) from official Soviet data.

	1981–85 average	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990
National income utilised	3.2	2.3	1.6	4.4	2.5	-4.0
Industrial production	3.9	5.5	4.6	6.3	0.4	-1.2
Agricultural production	1.0	7.1	-1.4	2.5	1.7	-2.3

Impact of *perestroika*

The results of these measures were not always as intended and often exacerbated existing problems in the economy.

- Food production showed a small increase in its growth rate from one to two percent during the period 1986–87, but it was still inadequate to feed the growing needs of the population. One-fifth of the Soviet Union's foodstuffs were imported.
- Enterprises were still subject to state interference: the state decided on the allocation of materials. The principle of devolving some power to managers often depended on the attitude of state bureaucrats, many of whom preferred to keep tight control to ensure targets were met.
- Products, especially foodstuffs, were diverted from state shops (where prices were low) to co-operatives that charged a much higher price. This produced inflation and stripped state shops of many supplies. This had a particularly bad impact on pensioners and other groups who lived on a fixed income.
- Co-operatives were able to shop around for a buyer who would offer them a good price for their goods. This resulted in deals being concluded with richer city authorities, leaving poorer cities devoid of adequate food and other basic products.
- The co-operatives proved to be more productive than the state sector and the potential for profits did not go unnoticed. The result was that they attracted the attention of corrupt government officials who demanded bribes for permission to continue to operate. Criminal gangs also saw the potential to exact money through extortion rackets. These gangs had become powerful due to them seizing the opportunity to make illegal alcohol under Gorbachev's anti-alcohol campaign. They now had the chance to add to their wealth.
- Uncertainty over supplies encouraged a wave of hoarding by the population. Shops were quickly emptied of goods as they arrived. Food rationing was introduced in some cities to try to ease the situation. In 1988, meat was rationed in 26 out of the 55 regions of Russia.
- The implementation of the principle of electing managers resulted in a steep rise in wages. Urban wages rose by nine percent in 1988 and 13 percent in 1989.
- Foreign companies keen to invest in the USSR were faced with endless bureaucracy that made progress slow. Sometimes it put off potential investors completely. By the end of 1990, there were nearly 3,000 joint foreign ventures in the USSR, but most of these were small-scale operations that had little impact on the economy.
- The reforms were often undermined by officials. In some cities, the reforms were ignored, in others they were sabotaged. In Leningrad, the city administration withdrew all sausages from shops and warehouses and buried them.

The situation was made worse by a fall in the price of oil. This had a significant impact, as the USSR had become more reliant on using oil exports as a source of foreign exchange. By 1984, oil and gas accounted for 54 percent of Soviet exports.

The reforms had weakened the apparatus of state planning but provided little to replace it. By the end of 1989, the Soviet economy was massively in debt and approaching crisis point. Gorbachev's promise of an improvement in consumer goods for the population had not been achieved; in fact, his reforms had made the situation far worse. Strikes had increased, as workers such as the coal miners in the Don Basin protested over unpaid wages and food shortages. The government's response was to quickly increase wages, but this was only a short-term measure. There was also little point in having more money if the shops were empty of things to buy. Gorbachev's failure to bring about an improved economic situation undermined his political power and position. It also led the way to what seemed the only solution: a dismantling of the Soviet economic system.

SOURCE 2 Hindered by centralised market forces: a long queue forms in Novokuznetsk for bacon and other meat from the butcher at a state-run market, June 1991.



State Commission on Economic Reform

In July 1989, the State Commission on Economic Reform issued a report that concluded that a more radical solution was needed. It called for a move to a market-led economy. The report split the Politburo. Reformers wanted to implement the recommendations quickly, while others, such as Ryzhkov, called for a more gradual transition. Gorbachev faced the difficult challenge of trying to maintain unity in the Party leadership and hesitated over making a decision. By October, Stanislav Shatalin, one of Gorbachev's economic advisers, put forward the 500 Days Programme, which recommended a rapid move to a market economy. The plan was rejected by the Soviet government but accepted by the Russian Parliament. Division between the central Party leadership and that of the national republics within the USSR caused chaos and the economy collapsed. Soviet output declined by one-fifth between 1990 and 1991. According to critics, *perestroika* had led to *catastroika* – an economic catastrophe.

Interpretations of Gorbachev's economic reforms

Interpretations of Gorbachev's economic reforms have been influenced by the attitudes of individual historians to communism as an economic system. In the West, historians have often adopted the view that liberal free-market economics are the best way of achieving material growth and supplying the population with its needs and wants. This has led many historians to the conclusion that communism was inherently weak and its economic failure was not surprising. Historians on the political left have taken a different perspective and view Gorbachev's economic reforms more positively. To these historians, Soviet economic weakness was not insurmountable. Many bad governments have been able to hold on to power through periods of economic decline, and economic failure would not in itself have brought about the collapse of the Soviet Union. Some historians draw attention to the context within which Gorbachev was acting. It is true to say that Gorbachev faced a very unfavourable international climate: a war in Afghanistan, falling oil prices, a US embargo on imports of technology to the USSR and the collapse of communist regimes in Eastern Europe during 1989.

EXTRACT 1 An interpretation of Gorbachev's economic reforms by historian P. Hanson, from his book *The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Economy*, published in 2003.

The major reforms introduced in the middle years of Gorbachev's leadership were of three kinds: measures to decentralise decision-making in what was still presumed to be a state-owned economy; measures to legitimise the unplanned, non-state economy; and measures to facilitate trade and investment...

The Gorbachev team embarked on this legislation, not as part of a plan already conceived in 1985 but in an evolutionary, trial-and-error way... Meanwhile it was becoming increasingly clear that discipline plus quality controls plus accelerated investment growth would not secure a significant and sustained improvement in economic performance.

A stagnating economy would ... have unpleasant consequences. [Gorbachev] would be leading a country unable to maintain its status as a superpower... And what of domestic unrest? Soviet workers might even, eventually, begin to behave like Poles. [Poles had rioted over food shortages in 1980–81].

EXTRACT 2 An interpretation of Soviet economic decline and its impact by A. Brown from his book *The Rise and Fall of Communism*, published by The Bodley Head in 2009.

The idea that the Soviet Union was doomed to collapse when it did because of poor economic performance is misleading at a more general level. Prolonged economic failure does not by itself lead to the downfall of a highly authoritarian regime. Given the extent to which, for reasons substantially independent of the condition of the economy, liberalisation and democratisation occurred in the second half of the 1980s, the severe economic problems were a very important contributory factor to the break-up of the Soviet Union. However, an unreformed Soviet Union would have dealt with dissatisfaction – the manifestations of which would have been on a much more modest scale – in the traditional way.

... The link between economic failure and turning out a government which exists in democracies does not apply in the same way to authoritarian or totalitarian regimes. The Soviet Union, furthermore, as should be clear, had far more sophisticated systems of control.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

Interpretations of Gorbachev's economic reforms

1 Extract 1 gives an interpretation of the impact of Gorbachev's economic reforms. Summarise the interpretation in one sentence.

2 What own knowledge would you use to support this interpretation?

3 Do you agree with Hanson's interpretation? What own knowledge could you use to challenge his interpretation?

4 In what ways does Extract 2 agree with the interpretation in Extract 1?

5 How far does Extract 2 agree with the interpretation given in Extract 1 on the significance of economic weakness?

EXTRACT 3 An interpretation of Soviet weaknesses in the mid-1980s, from A. Dallin, 'Causes of the collapse of the USSR', published in 2003.

> The loss of optimism and the loss of purpose readily led to a change in attitude...
>
> The so-called Harvard study of Soviet refugees in the 1950s, had concluded that young people were ... less critical of the Soviet system than their elders. But in the early 1980s a corresponding study of Brezhnev-era émigrés found evidence that... young people (as well as those with more education) now tended to be more negative...
>
> Specialists told us that the Soviet economy needed structural reform long before 1985. Above all, the central command economy had failed to keep up its previously impressive growth rate... the GNP plummeting (by Western estimates) from some 6 percent growth rates in the 1960s to perhaps 2 percent or less in the early 1980s.
>
> ... a totally disproportionate share of Soviet GNP (clearly over 15 percent...) was allocated for the arms race The result of these investments was to seriously distort the economy at precisely a time when the decline in its growth rate required cuts in allocations to other parts of the economy, including welfare, services, and consumption.
>
> Here then we have a combination of inherent trends and disastrous policy choices by the Soviet leadership.

EXTRACT 4 An interpretation by S. Phillips, from *A World Divided*, published by Pearson in 2009.

> Gorbachev had become increasingly unpopular at home. His policies for economic restructuring had failed to improve the living standards of the Soviet population. Food queues, strikes by workers in key industries who had not been paid wages for months, inflation and rising crime were all features of Soviet life by 1988. Most Soviet citizens felt that life had become more difficult since Gorbachev had attempted to breathe new life into the communist system... In 1985 Gorbachev had asked the Soviet people for new ideas on how to improve the communist system. By 1989 the answer was that a large section of the population wanted the entire system dismantled.

THINKING HISTORICALLY Interpretations (4a)

The weight of evidence

Work in pairs. Read Extracts 3 and 4 and answer the following questions.

1. Use highlighter pens to colour-code copies of the extracts. Use one colour for 'evidence', another colour for 'conclusions' and a third for language that shows the historian is 'reasoning' (for example, 'therefore', 'so'). Alternatively, draw up a table with three columns, headed 'Evidence', 'Conclusions' and 'Reasoning language' and copy the relevant parts of the extracts into the columns.
2. How do the extracts differ in terms of the way that the evidence is used?
3. Which of these extracts do you find more convincing? Which has the best-supported arguments?
4. What other information might you want in order to make a judgement about the strength of these claims?
5. Write a paragraph of 200 words explaining the importance of using evidence to support historical claims.

HOW SIGNIFICANT WERE THE FAILURES OF GORBACHEV'S POLITICAL REFORMS?

Gorbachev's economic reforms had failed to make much impact on attacking the fundamental weaknesses in the Soviet system and he realised that the main obstacle to reform was the Communist Party itself.

SOURCE 3 A Soviet joke from about 1985. From G. Hughes and S. Welfare, *Red Empire*, published in 1990.

> The train of Communism is trundling across the field of life one day when the engine splutters and dies.
>
> Comrade Stalin wakes up. 'Shoot the driver!' he suggests.
>
> Comrade Khrushchev demurs. 'Rehabilitate the driver!' he argues.
>
> Comrade Brezhnev settles comfortably back in his seat. 'Let's just pull the blinds down, close our eyes and rock from side to side,' he says. 'Then nobody will know the train has stopped.'
>
> Finally Comrade Gorbachev leaps to his feet. 'You've got it all wrong!' he shouts. 'What we need to do is get off the train and all shout together: the train isn't working, the train isn't working...'

Glasnost and the need to reform the Party

KEY TERM

Glasnost
Gorbachev's policy of openness that encouraged the population to put forward new ideas and show initiative.

The whole apparatus of Party and state had become huge and unmanageable. Under Brezhnev it had grown to resemble power blocs of vested interests who competed with each other. This rivalry was wasteful and the competition between different branches of administration had led to corruption and nepotism. Coupled with this trend was the issue of relations between the central planning apparatus in Moscow and that at regional level in each republic. Gorbachev recognised that the whole system needed streamlining. This would provide the additional benefit of offering the opportunity to remove those officials who were against reform. The need for reform was highlighted by the impact of ***glasnost***.

The impact of *glasnost*

What started as a method of getting new ideas to revitalise the Communist Party and re-engage the population with the Party descended into an open attack on its corrupt practices.

Key criticisms of the Party were as follows.

- Complaints about poor housing were popular.
- Investigations of Soviet history revealed details of Stalin's mass terror, the famine of the 1930s and the Katyn Massacre.
- Even the more sensitive issue of the Soviet victory in the Second World War was discussed. The myth of the Great Patriotic War was undermined by revelations of the reckless waste of human lives.
- Environmental issues were a popular topic, promoted by exposés of the damaging impact on the Aral Sea of government irrigation schemes.

It was difficult for Gorbachev to call a halt to *glasnost* once it had started, even if he had wanted to. The Soviet government's response to the Chernobyl nuclear accident in April 1986 convinced Gorbachev that *glasnost* was essential. The accident at Chernobyl nuclear power plant resulted in a wave of radioactive fallout drifting over much of northern Europe. No official announcement was made by the Soviet government until it was forced to respond to urgent calls for information after scientists in Scandinavia picked up readings of unusually high radioactivity in their air space. The Soviet government's delayed admission of an accident had disastrous results for its own people. An evacuation of people living in toxic areas was delayed, adding to the human cost of the accident. The result was an increase in cases of leukaemia and birth deformities. The Chernobyl affair reflected many of the weaknesses of the Soviet Union: the nuclear power plant was badly managed, it used outdated equipment, it had a poor record of health and safety, and its deficiencies were covered up by secrecy and evasion. It also did little to help Gorbachev's international reputation. To Gorbachev, the whole affair seemed to provide an urgent justification for *glasnost*.

By 1989, the Soviet population was much more politicised due to *glasnost*. There were over 60,000 informal groups and clubs holding meetings, organising demonstrations and adding their voices to the call for political reform. Instead of producing support for Gorbachev, *glasnost* resulted in a wave of criticism against the Party, much of it directed at Gorbachev for his weakness in pursuing radical reform. Many reformers in positions of power were unwilling to defend the Communist Party – of which they were members. It was no surprise that some leading reformers decided to resign from the Party.

EXTEND YOUR KNOWLEDGE

The Katyn Massacre
The murder of over 4,000 Polish army officers in April and May 1940. They were buried in a mass grave at Katyn forest in western Russia, which was discovered in April 1943 by German troops. The Soviet government accused the German army of having carried out the massacre, a lie that continued until 1991. It was not until *glasnost* that the truth was uncovered: the massacre had been carried out by Soviet troops. Documents revealed Stalin's orders for the massacre.

The Aral Sea
During the Brezhnev years the rivers that emptied into the Aral Sea in Kazakhstan were diverted to irrigate the expansion of the area where cotton was grown. The result was an environmental disaster of huge proportions. The Aral Sea covered an area of 68,000 km^2 in 1960; by 2004 it had shrunk by 90 percent. The soil contained a concentration of salt and toxic substances from pollution that created an uninhabitable desert. The remaining water was undrinkable. The changes altered the climate of the area around the sea, making it much hotter and drier. Concerns over the devastating impact on the sea were able to gain publicity due to *glasnost*. The irrigation scheme had been directed by the Communist Party and involved the embezzlement of large sums of money by corrupt local officials. The scandal therefore added to the growing criticism of the Party.

Gorbachev's attempted reforms of the Party

Defining the functions of Party and state

Gorbachev sought to separate Party and state. He attempted to do this at the Nineteenth Conference of the Communist Party in June 1988, but little was done to get individual officials to choose one over the other. This was not an easy task as the lines between the two had become blurred. This was largely the result of the nomenklatura system, whereby appointments and promotions within the state apparatus had relied on loyalty to the Party. It was often the case that the personnel of one organisation held an equivalent position in the other. In October Gorbachev became President of the Soviet Union as well as General Secretary of the Party. This mirrored the situation lower down the hierarchy, where First Secretaries in each republic also held the position of Chairman of the regional Soviet.

Shifting power from the Party to the Soviets

This was attempted by allocating more finance to the Soviets in order to give them the resources to support their role. Deputies of the Soviets were to be elected for five years rather than two, a move that gave them greater security in their post.

Streamlining the Party

The departments of the Central Committee of the Communist Party were reduced from 20 to nine, and six new commissions were created. It was accompanied by similar measures to streamline the state. In November 1985, Gorbachev had created 'superministries' to co-ordinate economic planning. Five ministries were merged to create one 'superministry' for agriculture.

A clampdown on corruption

One of the leading casualties was Brezhnev's son-in-law, Yuri Churbanov, who was sentenced to 12 years' imprisonment.

Attacks on corrupt Party officials were popular with the public but caused a lot of resentment within the Party. Gorbachev was given first-hand evidence of the difficulties this could cause when, in December 1986, Dinmukhamed Kunayev was removed from the position of First Secretary of the Party in Kazakhstan on grounds of corruption. His replacement was Gennady Kolbin, an ethnic Russian. Seeing this as outside interference, Kazakhs rioted in support of Kunayev. Order was only restored after several hundred protestors were killed. Gorbachev was responsible for both the sacking of Kunayev and the appointment of his successor and, as such, much of the blame for this incident was placed on his shoulders. It was a warning to Gorbachev that reform of the Party was fraught with potential dangers.

Moves towards **democratisation** and its impact

KEY TERM

Democratisation
An attempt, by Gorbachev, to get more people involved in the Communist Party and political debate.

- In early 1987 at a meeting of the Central Committee, Gorbachev discussed the idea of secret ballots for multiple candidates.
- In June, there was a limited experiment with multiple candidates in elections for local Soviets. This was a small but significant break with the practice of elections involving single candidates proposed by the Party.
- At the Nineteenth Party Conference of June 1988, Gorbachev announced that the principle of multi-candidate elections would be extended to national level with elections for the new Congress of People's Deputies. The Congress was set up to provide an independent, supervisory role over the government and was part of Gorbachev's attempts to separate the functions of Party from state. Members of the Congress were to be allocated to the Party and other organisations, such as trade unions and the Union of Writers. The Communist Party nominated 100 candidates for its 100 seats, but the trade unions and Union of Writers gave their members a choice. In some seats, voters could choose from 12 candidates. The Communist Party was the only legal political party and, as such, could control the nomination process. However, it was enough to engage the population in the process.

The elections for the new Congress of People's Deputies, which took place in March 1989, gave the Soviet public a taste of democracy. While the form of democracy introduced in 1989 was very different to that of Western European democracies, it represented a significant change in the context of the Soviet Union. It had weakened irretrievably the power of the Communist Party.

These reforms were criticised for being little more than tinkering with the system. While there is some truth in this, the reforms were certainly a step in the right direction.

The impact of Gorbachev's failure to reform the Party

Gorbachev became increasingly frustrated with his failure to change the mindset of conservative Party members. He had hoped that his reforms would act as a key method of increasing the involvement of the population with politics and strengthen support for his economic reforms. The failure of reforms to the Party left many reformers convinced that the solution was to move towards **pluralism**. Pluralism opened the possibility of a multi-party system whereby the Communist Party would have to earn its right to govern.

KEY TERM

Pluralism
A political system where there is more than one political party contesting elections. This would mean a change from the one-party system used in the USSR.

The impact on the unity of the Communist Party

- **Increasing divisions within the Party**. Gorbachev's failure to bring substantial reform of the Party alienated both 'liberals' and 'conservatives' in the Party. The increasing divisions undermined the authority of Gorbachev, who struggled to find common ground between them.

EXTEND YOUR KNOWLEDGE

'Liberals' versus 'conservatives'
The terms 'liberal' and 'conservative' are often applied to those either in favour of reform or against it, respectively. There were die-hard Stalinists like Andrei Gromyko on the one hand, and radical reformers such as Yeltsin on the other. Yet, to label individuals as either 'liberal' or 'conservative' is too simplistic. It was often the case that individuals considered each reform on its own merits. Some pushed for economic reform but remained against political change. Most saw the need for change but disagreed over the pace of that change. A good example of this pattern is Ligachev, who had been a force for change when he joined the Politburo in 1985 but who became increasingly concerned about the speed of change and was generally considered to be a 'conservative' when he was removed from office in 1990.

- **Alienating reformers**. For the more radical reformers, like Yeltsin, there was an increasing realisation that the Party would not carry through the reforms they felt were needed and desired. Disagreements between Yeltsin and Gorbachev came to a head at a Plenum of the Central Committee in October 1987. Yeltsin openly attacked Gorbachev's approach to reform as being too slow. He was subsequently sacked as Party First Secretary in Moscow and then removed from the Politburo in February 1988.
- **Alienating conservatives**. In March 1988, the hard-line communists in the Party attempted to strike back and gain some control over events. While Gorbachev was on a diplomatic trip to Yugoslavia, a letter was published in the newspaper *Sovetskaya Russia* by an unknown communist, Nina Andreeva. The letter complained about the constant undermining of the work of Stalin and attacked *glasnost* for its demoralising impact. Ligachev, who was acting as leader in Gorbachev's absence, took the initiative and used the letter as an opportunity to attack the pace of reform. What was worrying for Gorbachev was the fact that the sentiments were supported, not just by die-hard Stalinists such as Gromyko, but also by some of Gorbachev's own appointees such as Viktor Chebrikov.
- **The development of factions**. Arguments between liberals and conservatives had occurred within the Politburo and Central Committee. The impact of democratisation was to open up the possibility of both sides appealing to the wider public for support. Although factions within the Party were prohibited, informal groupings started to emerge during the elections for the Congress of People's Deputies. Reformers such as Yeltsin formed an Inter-Regional Group, and conservatives worried about upholding the territorial integrity of the Soviet Union formed *Soyuz*. When the Congress met, these groups formed a sort of unofficial opposition to the government.
- **The abolition of Article 6**. If the Communist Party could not be reformed then one logical conclusion to this was to end the political monopoly of the Party. Article 6 of the Soviet Constitution stated that the Communist Party held the position of 'the leading and guiding force of Soviet Society and the nucleus of its political system, of all state organisations and public organisations'. This Article enshrined the one-party state and therefore became a symbolic target for critics who wished to push towards real democracy. Andrei Sakharov was one of the leading critics who called for the ending of Article 6. For conservatives within the Communist Party, the Article was non-negotiable. Faced with growing criticism from liberals and continued resistance from conservatives, Gorbachev finally repealed it in March 1990 and thus ended the Party's monopoly on power. Other political parties could now be established to contest elections.

By the end of 1990, the Communist Party was powerless. Elections to local Soviets had seen Communist candidates defeated across the country. In Leningrad the opposition secured 60 percent of the seats. In the non-Russian republics support for national groups grew, especially in the Baltic States. Yeltsin had scored a victory for his newly formed grouping, Democratic Platform, in the elections for the Russian Congress of People's Deputies. In June, he dramatically resigned from the Communist Party, at last freeing himself from ties to the Party and to socialism.

The political vacuum in central government was filled, at least temporarily, by the election of Gorbachev to the position of President of the USSR by the Congress of People's Deputies. Presidential rule replaced Party rule, at least in theory. In practice, power had shifted from the centre to the regions.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

Gorbachev's political reforms

1 Explain how Gorbachev's economic reforms led to the need for political reforms.
2 Explain how the failure to reform the Communist Party weakened the position of both Gorbachev and the Party itself.
3 How did Gorbachev's policies of *glasnost* and democratisation undermine the Communist Party?

Interpretations of Gorbachev's failure to bring about political reform

Historians are generally agreed that the failure of Gorbachev to reform the Communist Party damaged his authority and that of the Party, but there is less agreement over whether this left him severely weakened. Western historians have generally viewed Gorbachev's political reforms as well-meaning although unlikely to have ever brought success. So-called 'essentialist' historians take the view that communism and the Communist Party were impossible to reform because they were, in essence, incapable of producing anything other than a totalitarian state, where freedom was not allowed and a one-party state could only be sustained through force. More recent research has questioned the inevitability of failure, viewing Gorbachev's political reforms as potentially workable, but undermined by both conservatives and liberals within the Party.

EXTRACT 5

From O. Figes, *Revolutionary Russia 1891–1991*, published in 2014.

To explain the speed with which it all collapsed, we need to look, not at the structural problems of the Soviet Union, but the way the regime unravelled from the top. There was no pressing need for the radical restructuring of the system. If there was a 'crisis', it was in the minds of Gorbachev and other reformers who sensed it in the growing divergence between Soviet realities and socialist ideals. It was Gorbachev's reforms that brought about the real crisis: the disintegration of the Party's power and authority. The conceptual revolution begun by glasnost allowed people to question the regime and demand an alternative.

Glasnost was the really revolutionary element of the Gorbachev reforms, the means by which the system unravelled ideologically. The Soviet leader intended it to bring transparency to government and break the power-hold of the Brezhnevite conservatives opposed to his reforms... But the consequences of glasnost quickly spiralled beyond Gorbachev's control.

By relaxing censorship, glasnost meant that the Party lost its grip on the mass media, which exposed social problems previously concealed by the government (poor housing, criminality, ecological catastrophes, etc.), thereby undermining public confidence in the Soviet system.

EXTRACT 6

An interpretation of Gorbachev by historian Dmitri Volkogonov, from *The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Empire*, published in 1998. Volkogonov was a member of the Soviet army's Political Administration and had access to the Soviet leadership. After August 1991, he became one of Boris Yeltsin's advisers.

[Gorbachev] wanted to restructure 'everything' without touching the socialist foundations of state ownership, the Party's 'leading role', and the regime's Communist goals. It is not hard to see that these goals were not attainable. To restructure everything, and yet to leave intact the foundations laid by Lenin, was a logical impossibility. The Communist system was not reformable. Either it exists, or it does not. This was something that Gorbachev, who was after all General Secretary of the Communist Party, either could not or did not want to understand.

... He began a process of democratic reforms over which he soon lost control. The culmination of perestroika, despite his intentions, was the total disintegration of the Communist system. It was not Gorbachev who brought this about; but he did nothing to prevent it from happening. The events which he launched developed according to their own logic and in complete disregard of the command mentality of the Central Committee.

AS Level Exam-Style Question Section C

Study Extracts 5 and 6 before you answer this question.

Historians have different views about the reasons for the fall of the Soviet Union. Analyse and evaluate the extracts and use your knowledge of the issues to explain your answer to the following question.

How far do you agree with the view that the collapse of the Soviet Union came about because Gorbachev failed to reform the Communist Party? (20 marks)

Tip

Remember you are assessing different interpretations. Integrate your own knowledge with the material in the extracts so that you test the validity of their interpretations. Note that the focus of the question is on 'the failure of Gorbachev's reform programme'. Do not forget to make reference to the extracts in your answer. Make sure you come to a reasoned judgement of your own.

WHAT IMPACT DID THE RESURGENCE OF NATIONALISM PLAY IN THE COLLAPSE OF THE USSR?

The Soviet Union had contained a large number of different nationalities besides Russians, as recognised in part by the fact that the Union was divided into 15 different republics and many republics contained semi-autonomous regions. When the Soviet Union collapsed it was replaced by 15 different independent states, a fact that in itself implies that nationalism may have played a large role in bringing about the end of the Soviet Union. The pattern of events tells a rather different story.

The ending of the Brezhnev Doctrine

Soviet control over Eastern Europe had been enforced by military action under what became known as the Brezhnev Doctrine. This Doctrine had been formulated after the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia in 1968 to prevent the Czech communist government introducing liberal reforms in response to popular protests. Brezhnev had made it clear that, 'Whenever internal and external forces hostile to Socialism try to reverse the development of a Socialist country towards the restoration of capitalism … this becomes the concern of all Socialist countries.' The threat of a Soviet intervention had played an important role in the Polish government's response to popular protests in 1980–81. In order to avoid a Soviet invasion, the leader of the communist government in Poland, General Jarulzelski, imposed martial law. The unrest was suppressed. However, Gorbachev decided that he would not uphold the right of the USSR to intervene in the affairs of other socialist countries.

The funeral of the Soviet leader, Konstantin Chernenko, in March 1985 provided the new General Secretary, Gorbachev, with the opportunity to meet every leader of the communist regimes of Eastern Europe. Each in turn was informed by Gorbachev that he would not intervene in their internal affairs. They were free to choose their own path of socialism.

Supporting satellite states had become increasingly expensive. The USSR spent approximately $40 billion annually on propping up communist governments around the world. This money could be used to promote domestic reform. Gorbachev hoped that many would follow his lead in economic reforms. He had a genuine belief that this was the way to rejuvenate socialism. Gorbachev refused to use force to keep the population under control. He believed the use of armed intervention was, in most cases, morally wrong. Instead of seeing foreign policy as a tool of class struggle against the forces of capitalism, Gorbachev focused on universal values of human rights to promote the interests of all peoples. The end of the Brezhnev Doctrine meant the peoples of Eastern Europe could choose their own governments. The consequences of this change were to be spectacular.

The consequences of the ending of the Brezhnev Doctrine in Eastern Europe

Gorbachev's reforms in the USSR led to attempts by some governments in Eastern Europe to reform in response to the new Soviet lead, as well as increasing the pressure for change from the public. Much of this pressure was driven by nationalist sentiments: communist rule had been imposed on Eastern Europe after the Second World War and was associated with Soviet control. Now there was an opportunity for each nation to decide its own future. This trend gathered momentum and the pace of events took many by surprise. Those governments that resisted these trends became quickly isolated.

The ending of the Brezhnev Doctrine posed a particular problem for those Eastern European leaders who wanted to resist reform. They could no longer rely on Soviet military intervention to buttress their regimes. Evidence that Gorbachev meant what he said came in 1989 when Hungary adopted a multiparty system and Polish elections returned a non-communist government. The USSR took no action; Gorbachev even offered his encouragement. The result was the collapse of communist regimes in Eastern Europe as national groups asserted their independence.

Poland

In Poland the communist government yielded to pressure from the independent workers' organisation, Solidarity, in 1989 and decided to allow it and any other political groups to stand in elections. In the general elections that followed, Solidarity was able to defeat the Communist Party in a landslide victory. In the face of this lack of support, the Communist Party collapsed as an organisation.

The USSR had done nothing to stop these events happening, indeed Gorbachev seemed to approve of the Poles deciding on their own future.

The message was clear to all those pressing for change in other east European states: the USSR no longer had any wish to impose itself on the internal affairs of Eastern Europe.

The communist collapse spreads

Hungary

In Hungary the pressure for reform came from within the Communist Party, and in 1988 Janos Kadar, the hardline leader since 1956, was sacked. The government, now dominated by reformers, decided to allow other political parties to contest elections.

East Germany

The end of the Brezhnev Doctrine was of particular concern to the East German regime. The creation of East Germany had been a result of superpower tension and hostility after the Second World War. As an artificial country, East Germany was more reliant on Soviet support than the other regimes of the region. Gorbachev's visit to East Berlin in October 1989 encouraged those who wished to push for reforms. With mass demonstrations on the streets of East German cities, the pressure for reform became unstoppable. Egon Krenz, who became East German leader in October 1989, refused to sanction widespread repression and, amid the growing chaos, decided to open access across the Berlin Wall. On 9 November, the Berlin Wall, the symbol of Cold War Europe, was dismantled by 'people power'.

Czechoslovakia

Also in November 1989, the communist regime in Czechoslovakia was forced to make concessions in response to public demonstrations calling for reforms. An organisation called Civic Forum emerged to co-ordinate the campaign to get rid of the communist government. Under severe public pressure, the communists caved in, reforms were introduced, and in December 1989 Václav Havel, a leading playwright and opponent of communism, was elected President.

Romania

Romania was afflicted by the weaknesses seen elsewhere: a discontented population tired of food shortages, a lack of consumer goods, a repressive government and a lack of real democracy. When demonstrations against the communist government started at the end of 1989, support for the regime collapsed. Nicolae Ceaușescu, Romania's leader, used the army to open fire on the demonstrators, but this merely increased the unpopularity of the regime. By December even the army was unwilling to support Ceaușescu and he was forced to flee Bucharest by helicopter. His arrest and subsequent execution on Christmas Day sealed the end of communism in Romania.

The impact of the collapse of communist regimes in Eastern Europe

In June 1979, Pope John Paul II had visited Poland. During his visit, he had addressed those living under communist rule with the words, 'Do not be afraid.' His words encouraged those who sought change. Nationalism had played a significant role in mobilising people power against Soviet-imposed communism. Where people power had been less significant, such as in Hungary and Bulgaria, reformers within the ranks of the Communist Parties had taken the lead in asserting national independence. Across Eastern Europe, the forces of communism had collapsed. It had been a swift and largely peaceful process, with the exceptions of Romania and Yugoslavia, where a bloody civil war accompanied the break-up of the country.

By the end of 1989, every pro-Soviet communist government in Eastern Europe had disintegrated. The role of Gorbachev was vital in changing the context in which these regimes operated. Gorbachev's foreign policy was, therefore, a key factor in encouraging the assertion of independence by the satellite states. This trend was to have an impact on the different nationalities within the Soviet Union.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

The collapse of communism in Eastern Europe

The year 1989 was very exciting to live through. How might the events in Eastern Europe influence the perspective of historians writing about communism?

The growth of nationalist sentiment within the USSR

The events that had unfolded in Eastern Europe since 1985 had highlighted the change in Soviet foreign policy and the opportunity for different nationalities to assert their independence. This opportunity began to seem more possible as the power of the Soviet Union weakened. In this context, the relationship between Russians and the national minorities within the USSR changed.

Factors encouraging the growth of nationalism within the USSR

- **Environmental concerns**. This issue was of particular interest to those in the outlying parts of the Soviet Union, where damage had often been greatest. Soil erosion due to the diversion of rivers had ravaged large parts of Central Asia; industrial pollution was a major concern in the Baltic republics. These issues provided a focal point for local people to rally against the central government in Moscow.
- **The insecurity of local Party leaders**. They were often those who felt most threatened by Gorbachev's economic and political reforms. Brezhnev's policy of 'trust in cadres' had left local communist leaders in positions of power and privilege. They had often built up sizeable powerbases and wealth through corruption. Brezhnev had left them alone; now Gorbachev's reforms threatened their cosy lifestyle. It was tempting for them to lend their support to popular local concerns in an attempt to maintain their position. Those who were seen as lackeys of Moscow were deeply unpopular.
- **Culture and language**. By the 1980s, the Soviet Union was almost equally divided between 145 million Russians and 141 million non-Russians. Among the non-Russians were a range of Slavic peoples, such as Lithuanians, Estonians, Latvians and Ukrainians, and non-Slavic peoples, most of whom were Muslim groups in Central Asia and the Caucasus region. These nationalities often had a strong sense of their own identity through their native language and cultural heritage.

Nagorno-Karabakh

Nagorno-Karabakh was an autonomous region within the Azerbaijan republic, populated largely by Armenians. Ethnic tensions arose over the desire of the Armenians in the area to join the Armenian republic. In 1988, these tensions erupted into violence. A referendum in the area had been organised that returned a large majority for joining Armenia. This referendum was unofficial and without the consent of the Soviet government. In another indication of the growing weakness of the central Soviet government, Armenia announced in November that Nagorno-Karabakh was now under its control. As violence continued, the Soviet government felt compelled to intervene and impose direct control from Moscow over the region. This 'outside interference' merely inflamed the situation.

The affair clearly demonstrated the declining power of the central Soviet government over the outlying republics and this was reinforced by the spread of other ethnic clashes in Georgia in 1989 and Kirgizstan in 1990. The decline in the authority of the central Soviet government also produced tensions in Moldavia. The growth of nationalism among the majority Moldavian population alarmed those of Turkish descent who feared discrimination and violence. There was also tension between the ethnic Romanian population and ethnic Russians.

These clashes had the effect of destabilising central control, but they did not necessarily pose a threat to the Soviet Union as a whole.

The Baltic republics

A much more serious threat to the territorial integrity of the Soviet Union was posed by the growth of nationalism in the Baltic republics.

- Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania had a different history to the rest of the Soviet republics. They had been independent states before their incorporation into the USSR in 1939 and there were people in the republics who remembered that. Many still viewed the Soviet Union as an occupying force.
- The Baltic republics had higher levels of education than the Soviet average and this had helped promote an understanding of their language, culture and history.
- They were among the more economically developed regions of the USSR.

These factors promoted a resurgence of feelings of nationalist identity.

- Between April and October 1988, Popular Fronts were established in all three republics. The lead was taken by members of the intelligentsia, who formed *Sajudis* (movements), but they quickly became mass organisations. They called for protection for their native languages and cultural traditions, but soon they demanded independence from the Soviet Union. In Lithuania the fact that over 75 percent of its population were ethnic Lithuanians helped give the movement strength and unity.
- In August 1989, the anniversary of the Nazi–Soviet Pact was used to stage a mass demonstration for independence. The Nazi–Soviet Pact of 1939 had resulted in the Soviet annexation of the three republics; its anniversary was used to call for its ending. A human chain of Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians holding hands was organised that stretched across the three republics. It was a show of independence.
- In 1990, the Popular Fronts won a majority in elections to the Supreme Soviets in all three Baltic republics. Lithuania took the lead in declaring independence from the Soviet Union. In March, the speaker of the Lithuanian Supreme Soviet, Vytautas Landsbergis, proclaimed that Lithuania was an independent state. The other two republics followed soon after. This was an illegal move and was a direct challenge to the Soviet government.

The Soviet government refused to acknowledge the declaration of independence, and in January 1991 pro-Soviet communists, supported by some Red Army troops, attempted to take over the television station in Vilnius, resulting in at least 13 deaths. It seemed to signal the start of a descent into civil war and bloodshed. Gorbachev denied giving any orders to the army to use force and it seems likely that the action was taken by rogue elements in the armed forces and the KGB, who wanted to pressurise Gorbachev into taking a firmer line against the nationalists. Gorbachev could have bowed to this pressure, but did not. He issued a statement that made it clear that calls for independence would not be prevented as long as the correct constitutional channels were taken.

SOURCE 4 Tallinn residents taking part in the 'Holding hands for Peace' chain across the Baltic States in August 1989.



The limits of nationalism

The only other republic where there was a significant nationalist movement was in Georgia. Huge demonstrations were held in favour of independence during 1989. Elsewhere there was little demand for breaking away from the Soviet Union.

- **Limited experience of independence**. In Ukraine the nationalist organisation Rukh was founded, but it had little support in the eastern half of the republic. Belarusia and the Central Asian republics had less experience of independence in their history.
- **The Soviet Union had allowed a degree of autonomous control** accommodating the wishes of its national peoples through supporting their languages in schools.
- **The republics had been net gainers of Soviet economic investment**, especially for the Central Asian republics. This was an advantage for them retaining the Union.
- **Loyalty to local and tribal groupings** was often stronger than nationalist sentiment, a feature that led to violence between different Muslim groups, such as Uzbeks and Kyrgyz and Uzbeks and Turkmens. Any wider national identity was superficial.
- **The role of ethnic Russians.** The nationalist resurgence was complicated by the large number of people who did not live in their ethnic homeland: 60 million Russians lived not in Russia but in the other republics of the Soviet Union.

A referendum held in March 1991 indicated popular support for maintaining the Soviet Union in all of the republics outside Georgia and the Baltic republics. Gorbachev's new Union Treaty of 1991 contained enough concessions for preserving language and customs in each republic to keep support for a continued union alive. There was plenty of evidence to indicate that the Soviet Union could survive without the Baltic republics and Georgia, and that the collapse of the Communist Party did not necessarily mean the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The role of Russian nationalism

Ultimately it was Russian nationalism that doomed the Soviet Union. Yeltsin had been elected Chairman of the Russian Supreme Soviet in March 1990 and from that position he was able to undermine Gorbachev's Union Treaty. Under the Soviet state, Russian institutions had been fused with Soviet ones and there was little differentiation between them. Russian nationalism, as distinct from attachment to a Russian-dominated Soviet Union, was hardly a popular mass movement; it was largely confined to the intelligentsia. In this respect it was very different to the rise of nationalism in the Baltic republics. Nonetheless, Yeltsin and his fellow reformers were happy to encourage Russian nationalism as a method of undermining the Soviet leader and the Communist Party. Yeltsin's encouragement to the national groups of the non-Russian republics to 'take as much sovereignty as you can stomach' was an example of this strategy of undermining the Soviet government.

For many who considered themselves Russian nationalists, the last thing they wanted was an end to a 'greater Russian empire'.

Yeltsin used the support for Russian nationalism to try to undermine Gorbachev's Union Treaty. He called for a much looser arrangement, a Commonwealth of Independent States made up of the former Soviet republics. The August coup of 1991 put an end to any hopes of Gorbachev's Union Treaty and with it the Soviet Union.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

The resurgence of nationalism

1 Make a list of the strengths of nationalist movements within the USSR and a list of their weaknesses.

2 Did nationalism within the Soviet Union make its collapse inevitable? Explain your answer.

Interpretations of the role of nationalism within the USSR

Historians in the West have tended to neglect the developments that occurred in the individual republics of the Soviet Union. Their focus has been on developments in Moscow and on the actions of those at the centre of the Soviet leadership. It could be argued that this approach is rather unbalanced. Where Western historians have used developments in the republics to explain the collapse of the Soviet Union, it has often been through the study of the rise of nationalist movements against communism in Eastern Europe. This approach was favoured by those historians who saw the collapse of the Soviet Union as part of the ending of the Cold War and gained particular favour in the years immediately after 1991. This approach is also problematic. The events of Eastern Europe were, in many ways, different to those of the Soviet Union and it would be unwise to assume that they were replicated by developments within the USSR itself. Recent research has started to focus on the developments in individual republics, highlighting the unique features of their experiences. Studies have also tended to be more cautious, often focusing on the success of the Soviet Union in maintaining unity for so long.

EXTRACT 7

An interpretation by David Marples, from *The Collapse of the Soviet Union 1985–1991*, published in 2004.

Problems in the republics surfaced almost immediately upon [Gorbachev] taking office and were only exacerbated by the more tolerant atmosphere within the media and the development of civic life at all levels of society. In the Baltic States, protests focused on the illegality of the Nazi-Soviet Pact. Arguably, Gorbachev could have negotiated the departure of the three Baltic States from the USSR and still maintained the Union. His hesitation ensured that the initiatives of Baltic leaders, and particularly the Popular Fronts, filtered down to the other republics...

Elsewhere in Ukraine there was a general feeling of dissatisfaction but it lay more with the management of the economy and the decline of living standards than with issues related to independence or national self-assertion.

The rise in national sentiment in the republics received a significant boost from the downfall of Communist regimes in Eastern Europe, and from contacts with the Soviet leadership in Moscow. In the first instance, Gorbachev's abandonment of the Brezhnev Doctrine sounded the death knell for decrepit governments... When the USSR did not respond to the regime changes ... then the Soviet republics could act with more confidence.

EXTRACT 8

An interpretation by Jeremy Smith, from *The Fall of Soviet Communism*, published in 2005.

The sudden and, to most commentators, surprising explosion of national unrest in the late 1980s, does not in itself prove that the division of the USSR along national lines was an inevitable event waiting to happen. For most of the Soviet period, nationality policies were successful in integrating diverse peoples under a single state. The policy did contain its own contradictions ... but some of these contradictions can equally be interpreted as signs of flexibility within the policy which was successful in holding the USSR together long after the world's other great empires had disintegrated. This flexibility was not, however, sufficient to adapt successfully to the totally different circumstances of the Baltic nationalities incorporated after 1945. Outside of the Baltics, it was ethnic conflict in the Caucasus which provided the strongest indications of failure of national policy. But these events are linked to economic and political upheaval as much as to any long-standing but suppressed nationalist tendencies...

National unrest in turn fed into political and economic turmoil, creating a declining spiral from which the USSR received its eventual deathblows.

A Level Exam-Style Question Section C

Study Extracts 7 and 8 before you answer this question.

In light of differing interpretations, how convincing do you find the view that the USSR fell because nationalism posed too great a challenge for the Soviet government after 1989?

To explain your answer, analyse and evaluate the material in both extracts, using your own knowledge of the issues.

Tip

Remember you are assessing different interpretations and testing their validity. Make sure you focus on the key words 'too great a challenge'. Discuss evidence that both supports and challenges this view. Make sure you integrate your knowledge with close reference to the extracts. Cross-reference the extracts to highlight areas of agreement/disagreement. Do not forget that you need to present your own interpretation in response to the question.

HOW FAR WERE GORBACHEV AND YELTSIN RESPONSIBLE FOR THE COLLAPSE OF THE USSR IN 1991?

The break-up of the Soviet Union, with its implications for Russia's role in international affairs, was deeply resented by a large section of the Russian population. This fact alone has led to a great deal of soul-searching and the apportionment of blame. It is tempting to place the blame for events on those leaders who were in positions of power at the time. This has resulted in a lively debate over the roles of Gorbachev and Yeltsin in bringing about the collapse of the Soviet Union. Intentionalist historians approach the concept of causation in history through the actions of individuals, yet their actions often produce results that are unintended and this suggests that it is the context within which they operate that exerts a powerful impact on the course of events.

EXTEND YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Historiographical approaches

Intentionalist historians focus on individuals and see that, through their actions, they can determine the course of events. This approach is common in Western historiography and reflects the prevailing attitude of liberal values in the West that see individuals and freedom as important. This approach is taken by biographers as well as historians. Much of the historiography of the fall of the USSR centres on the roles of Gorbachev and Yeltsin and their actions.

Structuralist historians tend to focus on the structures (political, economic and social) that restrict the ability of the individual leader to do as they wish. They see Gorbachev and Yeltsin as constrained by the organisations and movements that they belonged to and represented. If Gorbachev and Yeltsin had not existed, it would have made little difference to the course of history. Someone else would have taken their place with the same results.

Social historians tend to view history from the point of view of the ruled rather than the rulers. They draw attention to the experiences of the population and the accumulation of pressure they put on the rulers. This approach has been useful in drawing attention away from Gorbachev and Yeltsin to the people who made up their supporters and opponents. The experience of the Soviet elites, desperate to retain their power and influence, and the rise of nationalism have been highlighted by social historians.

Interpretations of Gorbachev's responsibility for the collapse of the USSR

Although celebrated as a hero abroad, Gorbachev was to become a figure of hatred within the USSR. To the countries of the West, Gorbachev was the Soviet leader who had the courage to end the Cold War and make the world a much safer place. He received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1990. He was also celebrated in the West as the leader who dismantled a repressive communist system. At the same time, Gorbachev was despised within the USSR as either a failed reformer or the person who destroyed the Soviet Union and, with it, Russia's importance as a superpower in world affairs.

Interpretations of Gorbachev have, therefore, been influenced by the passions he generated at the time and that continue to stir strong feelings. The debate over Gorbachev has been informed by the memoirs and accounts of many of his political aides, and these have not always been positive. Historians who see Gorbachev in a negative light point to Gorbachev's limitations as a leader.

Gorbachev's failings

- **Lack of vision**. It should not be assumed that Gorbachev had a clear idea of how to solve the economic problems of the USSR. He was well aware of the underlying weaknesses of the economy. His career through the Communist Party had helped him appreciate the failings of agriculture in particular. He was much less certain of the right solution to these problems. On becoming General Secretary in 1985, Gorbachev implemented a series of uncoordinated policies to address the issue of productivity and the slowdown in economic growth. When these failed to produce the results he expected, Gorbachev experimented with further methods. The change from acceleration to *perestroika* gave this process an air of considered planning that did not exist.
- **Naivety**. It is difficult to believe that Gorbachev did not think through the possible consequences of his policies, but most of his policies had unintended results and he can be criticised for making naive assumptions about their likely impact. The level of resistance from within the Party to his economic reforms was more than he expected, but his experience of how the Party worked in the regions of the USSR should have prepared him for this. He launched *glasnost* as an attempt to encourage support for his reforms from outside the Party, but it seems he did not consider the possibility that *glasnost* would open the floodgates for attacks on the central position of the Party and himself as General Secretary.
- **Powerbase**. Gorbachev's measures to reduce the power and role of the Communist Party left him, as its leader, exposed. He was attacking the base of his own power without ensuring an adequate replacement. His position as President of the USSR was a poor substitute, especially as he had refused to put the post to a popular election in 1990, a time when he would probably have won. This was a contrast to the approach of Yeltsin, who used popular support and elections to buttress his growing power against Gorbachev.
- **Expectations**. Gorbachev's reforms had the effect of raising people's expectations, both materially and politically, but failed to satisfy them.
- **Foreign policy**. The decision to end the Brezhnev Doctrine was based on the naive assumption that this would allow the communist states of Eastern Europe to reform and become regimes based on popular support. He had not anticipated the rapid collapse of communist governments in Eastern Europe in 1989, nor the impact this would have on nationalist groups within the USSR.

- **Insensitive handling of national minorities**. At key moments in the final years of the USSR, Gorbachev made decisions that were ill-judged and harmed the relationship between the central government and the government elites in the republics. His decision to replace Kunayev with the ethnic Russian, Kolbin, in Kazakhstan in 1986 inflamed tensions in the republic. His handling of the ethnic clashes in Nagorno-Karabakh was hesitant, and when the Soviet government declared a state of emergency and imposed direct control from Moscow in November 1988, it achieved little other than to make tensions in the area worse. The Soviet government's initial response to nationalist demonstrations and declarations of independence in the Baltic republics illustrated the lack of a clear strategy. The result was the confusion that resulted in deaths during the Soviet army's storming of the television tower in Vilnius in January 1991.
- **Inconsistency**. Gorbachev often gave mixed messages in his speeches. One example of this is his speech in November 1987 to commemorate the anniversary of the Revolution. He used the speech to praise Stalin's qualities as a leader, while condemning his 'real crimes'. He was trying to appeal to the die-hard Stalinists in the Party, but he alienated the more liberal reformers. Critics of Gorbachev accused him of moving position from supporting and promoting reform on the one hand to reining it in and giving in to the conservatives in the Party on the other. This became more obvious during December 1990, when Gorbachev removed reformer Vadim Bakatin from his position as Minister of the Interior and replaced him with hardliner Boris Pugo. Another reformer, Nikolai Ryzhkov, the vice-president of the USSR, was replaced by Gennady Yanaev. This 'move to the conservatives' resulted in the resignation of Eduard Shevardnadze, the Foreign Minister and another key reformer. The consequence of Gorbachev's seemingly ever-changing position made him enemies on both sides. On the conservative side, it was a factor in persuading the plotters of the August Coup of 1991 that they needed to take action. On the reformers' side, it crucially made it impossible for Gorbachev to work with Yeltsin.
- **Indecision.** At key moments Gorbachev was hesitant and postponed making crucial decisions. During the Chernobyl nuclear accident, he hesitated for several days before releasing information to the Soviet public and foreign press. He often made poor choices in personnel that did little to strengthen his position. In May 1990, when Yeltsin stood for Chairman of the Congress of People's Deputies for the RSFSR (Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic), Gorbachev supported Alexander Vlasov, a dull and uninspiring choice who provided too obvious a contrast with the more charismatic Yeltsin.

Gorbachev's actions had, in the words of historian Alexander Dallin (2003), led to a string of weaknesses consisting of 'destabilisation, delegitimation and disintegration'. With the decline in Soviet power and institutions, Soviet citizens had to find alternate focal points for their identity. The most powerful were real or imagined national communities.

EXTRACT 9

An interpretation of Gorbachev by historian Dmitri Volkogonov from *The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Empire*, published in 1998. Volkogonov was a member of the Soviet army's Political Administration and had access to the Soviet leadership. After August 1991, he became one of Boris Yeltsin's advisers.

> It is still difficult to write about Gorbachev. ... he is part of us. To write about him is to write about ourselves. He is among us now, and – like many of us – what he says in his speeches often contradicts what he did when his star was in the ascendant...
>
> Of the books written about Gorbachev by his close aides, most are by people who have remained loyal to him... Gorbachev's chief of security, Vadim Medvedev, has written interestingly on life behind the scenes at the Kremlin. By contrast, a book by Gorbachev's assistant Valeri Boldin, which came out first in America and then in Russia, appears motivated by deep personal animosity towards its subject, and Gorbachev emerges as vain and egocentric, suspicious of everyone and susceptible to flattery from abroad...
>
> Whatever has been said of him, Gorbachev had no plan or grand strategy... Even after August 1991, Gorbachev did not contemplate the liquidation of the system: he wanted its 'improvement'. How could a totalitarian society be 'improved'? ...

In defence of Gorbachev

Gorbachev did not intend to bring down the communist state or end the Soviet Union, and his reforms can be defended as a perfectly reasonable attempt to ensure their survival. All of Gorbachev's reforms have received support from historians, most noticeably Archie Brown in *The Gorbachev Factor* (1997). Interpretations which take a more positive approach to Gorbachev consider the difficult challenges that he faced, many of which were not of his own making.

- Historian Ronald Suny believes that Gorbachev's error was to attempt economic reform, democratisation and decolonising the republics all at the same time. Each policy had merits, but the impact of all three at the same time proved too much for the Soviet state to withstand. There is no denying that the combination of these policies put an enormous strain on the system of government, but the three policies were intrinsically linked. Economic reform could not progress without political reform, and this required a reduction in the power of the Communist Party as it posed the chief obstacle to further progress. Political reform reduced the hold of central government over the republics, whose elites were threatened by the changes needed to the economy. To guide the Soviet Union through this process of change required a leader of immense talent.
- There is no denying Gorbachev's skills as a leader. He was intelligent, although his understanding of economic matters was limited, and he had personal charm. This last attribute was called upon to keep broad support for his programme of reforms. Given the divisions between reformers and conservatives, this was a considerable challenge that he succeeded in for much of his time as General Secretary.

- It is to his credit that Gorbachev avoided using force to impose his will. The Chinese approach of sending in armed forces to kill protestors, as occurred in Tiananmen Square in Beijing in June 1989, was something that Gorbachev was not prepared to contemplate. This was despite the pressure to do so during the declarations of independence by the Baltic republics in 1990. There was a serious risk that the Soviet Union would descend into a vicious civil war and Gorbachev was not prepared to see this outcome, even if it risked losing the Soviet state.
- The chances of success for Gorbachev's reforms were undermined by a chance combination of international factors that could not be foreseen. The Soviet war in Afghanistan was not of his doing, Brezhnev had agreed the invasion in 1979, but it took longer to withdraw from than was anticipated. The fall of world oil prices had a severe impact on the Soviet economy, which resulted in economic reforms being carried out in a highly unfavourable situation. The US Star Wars policy kept the pressure on the Soviet Union to continue to divert much-needed resources away from consumer goods and social welfare spending. It was not as though Gorbachev ignored this pressure. His foreign policy brought about an end to the Cold War and this provided the opportunity to shift resources from the military, although this did not endear Gorbachev to the army. In 1988, a major earthquake in Armenia resulted in over 25,000 deaths and added to the pressures on Gorbachev's government. Luck was not on his side.

EXTRACT 10 An interpretation by George W. Breslauer, in an article, 'Evaluating Gorbachev and Yeltsin as Leaders', in A. Brown and L. Shevtsova (eds), *Gorbachev, Yeltsin and Putin*, published in 2001.

> The event-making man not only makes a difference but does so because of his exceptional personal qualities. On this score, the evidence seems to be conclusive. Even those who criticise Gorbachev for the limits of his flexibility in his last years in power acknowledge that he was an unusual member of the Chernenko-led Politburo. No member of that Politburo has been portrayed as capable of seizing the initiative on socio-political and international issues the way Gorbachev eventually did. Gorbachev's intellectual capacity and flexibility ... his faith that turbulence will 'smooth out' in the long run ... have been noted by observers... By previous Soviet standards, as well as by comparative international standards, he stands out as a man of unusual leadership capacity.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

Interpretations of Gorbachev

Look at Extracts 9 and 10.

1 In what ways do these sources give different interpretations of Gorbachev as Soviet leader?

2 On what evidence do you think each of these interpretations are based?

SOURCE 5 Boris Yeltsin (right) verbally attacks Mikhail Gorbachev at the Plenum of the Communist Party's Central Committee in October 1987.



ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

Gorbachev and Yeltsin

Why did Yeltsin choose this occasion to attack Gorbachev?

The role of Yeltsin in the collapse of the USSR

Boris Yeltsin presented an image of a politician in touch with the wishes of the people. He possessed the popular support that Gorbachev never convincingly held. Using his reputation as a reformer, alongside this base of popular support, Yeltsin was in a strong position to challenge Gorbachev's leadership. In the final death throes of the Soviet Union, the relationship and rivalry between these two leaders played a highly significant role.

When Yeltsin was removed from the Politburo in February 1988 it seemed to most observers that his political career at the highest level was over. Four years later he played a decisive role in bringing the Soviet Union to an end.

How did Yeltsin challenge Gorbachev's leadership?

- Yeltsin used his time out of the spotlight to establish firmer links with other reformers and critics of Gorbachev.
- Yeltsin was expert at using opportunities to appeal to the public for sympathy and support. His attack on Gorbachev and his policies at the Central Committee Plenum of 1987 was conducted in an arena that had television coverage. He met with the leaders of the Russian Orthodox Church, visited striking miners and organised demonstrations to show support for his actions as Chairman of the Russian Congress. In March 1991, 200,000 people gathered in Moscow to support Yeltsin.
- Gorbachev's decision to hold elections for the Congress of People's Deputies in 1989 gave Yeltsin an opportunity to launch his comeback. He used his position as mayor of Moscow to organise demonstrations in his support and secured 89 percent of the vote in the city. This gave him a claim to legitimacy that Gorbachev never had. His election to the People's Congress gave him a platform to attack Gorbachev and the Soviet government, but he realised that his efforts would not bring change until the hold of the Communist Party over the central Soviet government was broken.
- He therefore needed an alternative power base and used his election to the Congress of People's Deputies for the RSFSR in 1990 to attack the central Soviet government. Yeltsin's Democratic Russia movement secured most of the votes in the cities, but not the countryside, which supported more conservative candidates. It was enough, nonetheless, to enable Yeltsin to be elected chairman of the Congress in May 1990. From this moment onwards, Gorbachev faced a direct challenge to his authority from the leader of the Soviet Union's key republic: Russia.
- From this position, Yeltsin passed a series of measures that undermined Gorbachev. In July 1990, Yeltsin resigned from the Communist Party. The Congress declared that its sovereignty took precedence over that of the Soviet Union. In effect this meant that the Russian Congress considered itself above the authority of the Soviet government. Gorbachev declared the move illegal but it set the scene for a continual struggle between the governments of the Soviet Union and Russia.
- Yeltsin encouraged the nationalist movements of the non-Russian republics in a move that was calculated to further reduce the influence of the central government.

By 1990, Gorbachev and Yeltsin loathed each other and were in a constant struggle to direct the course of events. So it was a surprise when, in the spring of 1991, they decided to work together to pursue reform. They joined forces to negotiate and support the Novo-Ogarevo Agreement, which formed the basis of Gorbachev's Union Treaty of 1991. Whether Yeltsin was genuine in this period of co-operation with Gorbachev has been much debated. Historian Robert Service views Yeltsin's approach as a cynical manoeuvre to keep a weak Gorbachev in power until he was ready to destroy him. The opportunity to do this came in the aftermath of the August Coup of 1991.

Yeltsin and the August Coup of 1991

Led by conservatives within the Communist Party, the coup was a last-ditch attempt to preserve the territorial integrity of the Soviet Union and the rule of the Communist Party. While Gorbachev was on holiday in the Crimea, a State Emergency Committee was formed to take over the running of the country. The coup leaders included Gorbachev's vice-president Gennady Yanaev, Vladimir Kryuchkov (head of the KGB) and Dmitri Yazov (the Defence Minister). They were supported by some of the leading army officers. At a press conference, Yanaev announced that Gorbachev was ill (in fact he was being held under house arrest) and a state of emergency would rule in his absence. A series of repressive measures was hastily announced, including a ban on strikes and demonstrations. Tanks were ordered onto the streets of Moscow to uphold law and order. The significance of the coup and its consequences were unclear at the time.

SOURCE 6 British Ambassador Rodric Braithwaite's telegram from 19 August 1991.

> [The next few days] will determine whether Russia is relapsing into sullen acquiescence or that she is once again entering a time of troubles, as our friends here have so long feared. I do not think that this is foregone, even though what has already happened is far more ominous, far-reaching and potentially bloody, than the events in Lithuania in January. But whatever now happens, the prescriptions for policy are much the same now as they were in the winter... The difference is, of course, that last January we could signify our support for 'Gorbachev the Reformer,' and hope to influence the man. It may be a long time before another such figure appears in Russia to catch the imagination and personify the hopes of foreigners. And Moscow already resounds to the keening of liberal intellectuals who now regret that they did not support Gorbachev while he was still there.

The coup lasted four days. It had been poorly planned and implemented without the whole-hearted backing of the armed forces. The leaders of the coup were unsure how to proceed.

EXTRACT 11 An interpretation by Peter Kenez, from *A History of the Soviet Union from Beginning to End* (2006).

> The putschists [plotters] accomplished the opposite of what they had intended: by their actions they demonstrated there was no force behind them, and that the old order could not be reconstructed. Their press conference, in which they allowed themselves to be ridiculed and showed themselves to be helpless, drunken and fearful men, was a demonstration of the bankruptcy of the old order. Although the regime managed to hold on for four more months, this ill-considered conspiracy was the real end of the Soviet era...

THINKING HISTORICALLY Change (4a)

Significance

Look at the two accounts of the August Coup in the Soviet Union in 1991 (Source 6 and Extract 11).

1. In what ways does British Ambassador Rodric Braithwaite think that the coup might be significant?
2. How significant does Braithwaite seem to think the coup might be in the long run?
3. Compare this to historian Peter Kenez's interpretation. What significance does Kenez ascribe to the August Coup of 1991?
4. Why do you think these views might differ so greatly?

The key impacts of the August Coup on developments were as follows.

- Yeltsin's stand against the plotters greatly enhanced his reputation as a defender of freedom and reform. His demand that Gorbachev be released from house arrest and returned to his position as President of the USSR had the advantage of making his stance seem less like he was using the coup as an opportunity for self-seeking publicity.
- Emboldened by his enhanced position after the failure of the August Coup, Yeltsin quickly introduced a series of measures that speeded up the collapse of the Soviet Union. He launched a programme of market reform in the economy. By the summer of 1991, the monopoly of the Communist Party had been legally ended, and Yeltsin and other reformers from the Communist Party were free to establish the Democratic Reform Movement as a political party. In November he banned the Communist Party of the Soviet Union within Russia.
- Yeltsin then undermined the new Union Treaty. It is doubtful whether the Union Treaty would have survived after the August Coup. The plot had shown the dangers of action by conservatives in the Soviet government. An opportunity to finally kill the Treaty was presented when Ukrainian President Leonid Kravchuk refused to sign it and asked for further negotiations. Yeltsin decided to follow suit in November. In its place, Yeltsin organised the Commonwealth of Independent States, a much looser arrangement that required no central Soviet government. When this was implemented in December 1991, the Soviet Union was no more.

SOURCE 7 Yeltsin outside the White House, the Russian Parliament building in Moscow, during the August Coup, 1991. He personally confronted the soldiers in the tanks and asked them to return to their barracks.



ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

1 List the strengths and weaknesses of both Gorbachev and Yeltsin as leaders.

2 Who do you think was most responsible for bringing about the collapse of the USSR? Explain your answer.

ACTIVITY
WRITING

Gorbachev and Yeltsin

Use the words in the list below to complete the sentences so that they best describe the issues facing Gorbachev and Yeltsin.

fundamental; ingrained; superficial; integral; endeavoured; entrenched

Gorbachev found it difficult to address the economic weaknesses of the Soviet Union. Corruption and nepotism were ..... in the system. They had become so ..... that they were considered key features of the regime. When he attempted to reform the Party, these problems were to pose an enormous challenge. Gorbachev ..... to bring life back into the system, but, at heart, socialism remained ..... to his vision of the Soviet Union. For Yeltsin, reform was impossible; the changes required would need to be more ..... than .....

Interpretations of Yeltsin's role in the collapse of the Soviet Union

Interpretations of Yeltsin's role have varied depending on the personal view of the writer towards the more liberal reforms Yeltsin put forward. His supporters saw him as the leader who had the solutions to the problems of his time. Yet as leader of Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Yeltsin was unable to deal effectively with the economic problems that faced Gorbachev. As the years have passed, interpretations of Yeltsin have been less kind to him. They have focused on the following issues.

- Was Yeltsin more interested in his own power than principles? Was Yeltsin prepared to sacrifice the Soviet Union for the sake of boosting his own political position?
- Did Yeltsin control events or simply make use of them? Divisions between conservatives and reformers would have existed without Yeltsin. Nationalist movements in the non-Russian republics did not rely on Yeltsin for the growth in their support. However, Yeltsin was extremely well placed to take advantage of Gorbachev's weakness and the growing fragility of the Soviet Union to deliver the final blow.

EXTRACT 12 An interpretation of Boris Yeltsin by Vitaly Tretiakov, head of the weekly paper, *Moskosvskiie Novosti* (2006, No. 4–6).

... Despised by the majority of citizens in the country, Yeltsin will go down in history as ... having corrupted (the country) to the breaking point, not by his virtues and or by his defects, but rather by his dullness, primitiveness, and unbridled power lust of a hooligan...

EXTRACT 13 An interpretation by George W. Breslauer, in an article, 'Evaluating Gorbachev and Yeltsin as Leaders', in A. Brown and L. Shevtsova (eds), *Gorbachev, Yeltsin and Putin*, published in 2001.

During 1988–1991, Boris Yeltsin established himself as the hero of the anti-communist opposition to Soviet rule. After his overwhelming electoral victories of March 1989 and June 1991, followed by his facing down of the coup plotters in August 1991, his authority at home and abroad had become legendary. He had evolved into a charismatic leader of almost mythic proportions, especially among those who had assumed that the Soviet and communist control structures were unassailable. Thus, as an oppositional leader, Yeltsin is likely to go down in History as a uniquely courageous and effective figure who managed to prevail against seemingly overwhelming odds...

Moreover, his success during 1990–1991 in decoupling the concept of 'Russian' from that of 'Soviet' was both intellectually and politically inspired, as was his insistence in March 1991 that Russia choose a president by popular election for the first time in its thousand-year history. Yeltsin was a revolutionary hero who achieved what he did through his extraordinary personal traits...

Those who approve of Yeltsin's role in destroying the communist and soviet systems acclaim his leadership in this period, while those who disapprove of these ends censure him accordingly. But neither side would contest the observation, which is value-neutral, that Yeltsin was, in his leadership role, an 'event-making man'.

THINKING HISTORICALLY Interpretations (4b)

Method is everything

Bad history
- Based on gut feeling
- Argument does not progress logically
- No supporting evidence

Extract 1
An except from a history book with quotes making a point about an event

Good history
- Based on an interpretation of evidence
- Argument progresses logically
- Evidence deployed to support argument

Work in pairs.

Historical writing can reveal much about the methods by which it was constructed. Read Extracts 12 and 13 and answer the questions.

1 Look carefully at the spectrum of methodology above.

a) Where would you place each source on the spectrum of historical practice?

b) What evidence would you use to support your choice?

2 Look at Extract 12. How would you change it to make it the same quality of historical writing as Extract 13?

3 Use a dictionary. Explain the following words in their relation to historical writing: substantiation, deduction, inference, cross-reference.

4 How important is it that historians understand and evaluate the methods used by other historians?

THINKING HISTORICALLY Cause and consequence (4a&b)

Fragile history

Nothing that happens is inevitable. There are causes of change which did not have to develop as they did. Something could have altered or someone could have chosen differently. What actually occurred in the past did happen, but it did not have to be like that.

Work on your own and answer the questions. When you have answered the questions, discuss the answers in groups.

1 Consider the introduction of *glasnost* and the growing criticism of the Communist Party of the time.

a) How did the introduction of *glasnost* affect the growing criticism of the Communist Party?

b) Had there been no criticism of the Communist Party would the introduction of *glasnost* still have been important?

c) What other aspects of the situation existing in 1986–91 would have been affected had there been no *glasnost*?

2 Consider the growth of nationalism in the republics of the USSR and the incidents of the August Coup and Yeltsin's decision to refuse to agree to the new Union Treaty.

a) How important is the growth of nationalism as a causal factor of the two events?

b) What might have happened had Yeltsin decided to agree to the new Union Treaty?

Development	Event	State of Affairs	Event	Trigger Event
The growth of nationalism in the republics of the USSR	The introduction of glasnost in 1986	The growing criticism of the role of the Communist Party	The August Coup, 1991	Yeltsin's decision to refuse to agree to the new Union Treaty

3 What other consequences came about as a result of the information in the table? Try to identify at least one consequence for each.

4 Choose one factor. How might the fall of the Soviet Union have developed differently if this factor had not been present?

Conclusions

Interpretations of recent historical events, such as the fall of the Soviet Union, are inevitably provisional. As time passes, greater reflection is possible and the significance of events can be seen in their wider context. While historians have identified the factors that contributed to the collapse of the Soviet Union, the relative significance of these factors will continue to excite debate and passion. The joy of studying history is being able to evaluate these interpretations and participate in this debate.

ACTIVITY SUMMARY

Interpretations of the collapse of the Soviet Union

1 Make a list of the problems historians face studying this issue.

2 How, and why, do interpretations differ over the significance of the following factors in the collapse of the Soviet Union?

a) Economic weaknesses.

b) The failure of Gorbachev to reform the Communist Party.

c) The resurgence of nationalism within the Soviet Union.

d) The role of Gorbachev and Yeltsin.

3 What is your own interpretation of the causes of the collapse of the Soviet Union? Explain your answer.

WIDER READING

Brown, A. *The Gorbachev Factor*, Oxford University Press (1997)

Figes, O. *Revolutionary Russia 1891–1991*, Penguin (2014)

Hanson, P. *The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Economy*, Longman (2003)

McCauley, M. *The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Union*, Routledge (2007)

Service, R. *A History of Twentieth Century Russia*, Penguin (1997)

Smith, J. *The Fall of Soviet Communism*, Palgrave Macmillan (2005)

Suny, R. *The Soviet Experiment*, Oxford University Press (1998)

Suny, R. (ed.) *The Structure of Soviet History*, Oxford University Press (2003)

Volkogonov, D. *The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Empire*, HarperCollins (1998)

Preparing for your AS Level Paper 1 exam

Advance planning

1. Draw up a timetable for your revision and try to keep to it. Spread your timetable over a number of weeks, and aim to cover four or five topics each week.
2. Spend longer on topics that you have found difficult, and revise them several times.
3. Above all, do not try to limit your revision by attempting to 'question spot'. Try to be confident about all aspects of your Paper 1 work, because this will ensure that you have a choice of questions in Sections A and B.

Paper 1 overview:

AS Paper 1	Time: 2 hours 15 minutes	
Section A	Answer 1 question from a choice of 2	20 marks
Section B	Answer 1 question from a choice of 2	20 marks
Section C	Answer 1 compulsory interpretations question	20 marks
	Total marks =	**60 marks**

You should familiarise yourself with the layout of the paper by looking at the examples published by Edexcel. The questions for each section are followed by eight pages of lined paper where you should write your answer.

Section A questions

Section A questions ask you to analyse and evaluate either cause or consequence. You should consider either the reasons for, or the results of, an event or development. You will be asked for coverage of a period of around ten years, possibly a little longer. For example, a question for Option 1F might be 'Was the involvement of President Truman the main reason for the changing status of black Americans in the years 1945–55?' Your answer should consider the reason(s) given in the question, then look at other relevant points and reach a conclusion.

Section B questions

Section B questions cover a longer timespan than in Section A, at least one third of the period you have studied. The questions take the form of 'How far…', 'How significant…', 'To what extent…' or 'How accurate is it to say…'. The questions can deal with historical concepts such as cause, consequence, change, continuity, similarity, difference and significance. Again, you should consider the issue raised in the question, consider other relevant issues, and then conclude with an overall judgement.

Section C questions

There is no choice in Section C, which is concerned with the historical interpretations you have studied linked to the question 'What explains the fall of the USSR, c1985–91?' You will be given two extracts totalling around 300 words (printed separately) and the question will take the form 'How far do you agree with the view that…?' There is no need to use source analysis skills such as making inferences or considering provenance for Section C answers. You will need to use the extracts and your own knowledge to consider the view given in the question.

Use of time

This is an issue that you should discuss with your teachers and fellow students, but here are some suggestions for you.

1. Do not write solidly for 45 minutes on each question. For Section A and B answers you should spend a few minutes working out what the question is asking you to do, and drawing up a plan of your answer. This is especially important for Section B answers, which cover an extended period of time.
2. For Section C it is essential that you have a clear understanding of the content of each extract and the points that each extract is making. Read each extract carefully and underline important points. You could approach your answer by analysing the first extract, then the second, and then using your own knowledge before reaching an overall judgement. You might decide to spend up to ten minutes reading the extracts and drawing up your plan, and 35 minutes writing your answer.

Preparing for your AS Level exams

Paper 1: AS Level sample answer with comments

Section A

These questions assess your understanding of the period in breadth. They will ask you about the content you learned about in the four key themes, and may ask about more than one theme. For these questions remember to:

- give an analytical, not a descriptive, response
- support your points with evidence
- cover the whole time period specified in the question
- come to a substantiated judgement.

Was Brezhnev's style of leadership the main reason for growing political stagnation in the USSR in the years 1964–82? (20 marks)

Average student answer

By 1982 the Soviet Union was ruled by a collection of elderly men, often referred to as a gerontocracy. Most of its leading members were over 65 years of age, some well into their seventies. This gave the impression that the Soviet government was incapable of change because it was made up of individuals who did not understand the mounting problems of the USSR and who were devoid of any solutions.

The Soviet government under Brezhnev was in the hands of the Politburo, the Communist Party's inner body, made up of a group of about 15 people who made policy decisions. The Politburo had declined in power and influence during Stalin's leadership – he preferred to make decisions with a much smaller group of close, loyal colleagues – but after Khrushchev became leader during the mid-1950s the Politburo once again became important. The influence of the much bigger Central Committee of the Communist Party also grew under Khrushchev. During the Brezhnev years, government decisions were dominated by these organisations. Brezhnev may have been General Secretary, but in practice he exercised less power than previous Soviet leaders. His friends and colleagues who he knew from his early career, like Chernenko, became powerful as Brezhnev promoted them to key positions in the Party and government. This group of Brezhnev's cronies have been termed the 'Dnepropetovsk mafia'.

This is a weak opening paragraph because it does not analyse and define the

This paragraph is also weak because it gives little sense of addressing the focus of the question. Details of government are given, but there is still no explanation of 'growing political stagnation'. There is also some drifting out of the timescale of the question. It can be useful to set the scene, but too much straying outside the dates in the question reduces time that could be used to make more directly relevant points.

Brezhnev preferred to avoid making changes to the personnel of the Party and under his leadership it was much more common for party officials to be promoted from within the regions they served. He also shied away from dismissing party officials. This approach of 'trust in cadres' resulted in a much more stable system. Unfortunately it resulted in growing stagnation. Moving party and government officials around the country had been used by Stalin and Khrushchev as a way of spreading new ideas and approaches and avoiding people becoming too comfortable in their jobs. Without this, Soviet government lacked initiative and creativity, both desperately needed to tackle the growing economic stagnation of the period. Regional party bosses, safe in their positions of power, started to become more corrupt. Corruption was especially common in the Central Asian republics of the USSR, where their distance from Moscow made them less likely to experience interference from central government.

At the level of central government, many of Brezhnev's cronies became too comfortable in their posts. Party members, such as Kirilenko and Romanov, stayed in the Politburo for a long time, Kirilenko was elected in 1966 and was still a member in 1982. With such long tenures of office, these officials developed into oligarchs who wielded enormous power over the areas of policy they controlled. It seemed that the only way the top officials could be removed was by death.

One of the other reasons for growing political stagnation was the Communist Party's use of the nomenklatura system. This had been developed during Lenin's leadership and had become an entrenched method of promoting people within the Party. Positions were filled by appointing people who were on a list of approved officials. This system gave considerable power to the General Secretary as the one responsible for giving approval for adding individuals to the list. This system may have ensured loyalty to the leadership, but it discouraged those who wished to try new ideas that might not gain acceptance from the leadership. Many people viewed the Communist Party as little more than a mechanism for getting on and furthering their career and this explains why Party membership soared from 6.9 million in 1953 to 17 million by 1980.

Another reason for the growing political stagnation was Brezhnev's increasing lack of control. This was a result of his failing health and growing senility. He had suffered his first heart attack in the mid-1970s and his health deteriorated thereafter. He found it difficult to summon the energy to tackle difficult issues. Evidence of his lack of control was to be found in his inability to keep his own family within the law. His daughter Galina caused gossip when she ran off with Boris 'the gypsy', but there were also more serious allegations of her involvement in diamond smuggling. Much of this information was collected by Yuri Andropov, the head of the KGB, and it did little to arrest the declining authority of the Soviet leader.

There were many reasons for the growing political stagnation experienced by the Soviet Union during the years 1964 to 1982 and a lot of the responsibility for this stagnation rests with Brezhnev. He preferred to rule by avoiding change and therefore conflict. His preferred style was to indulge himself in the trappings of power while letting others get on with their jobs. This approach made him popular within the Party, but resulted in a system that did not desire change and therefore was unwilling to address the need for reform.

These sections are better because they are starting to address the issue of political stagnation and the reasons behind it. There is a reference to Brezhnev's style of leadership, but this is not developed.

These sections are more relevant, but read like a list. The clue is 'another reason'. Remember that you should be providing reasoning as to which factor is the 'main reason'. It is a good strategy to try to link the factors.

The concluding paragraph makes a judgement that is relevant, but it lacks reasoning to make this judgement convincing. Think about the role that was played by Brezhnev in the growing political stagnation. Did he cause it or merely add to existing trends in the system?

Verdict

This is an average answer because:

- it lacks a direct focus on the key words in the question
- it does not always use precise evidence to back up points
- it does not come to a strong reasoned judgement.

Use the feedback on this answer to rewrite it, making as many improvements as you can.

Paper 1: AS Level sample answer with comments

Section A

These questions assess your understanding of the period in breadth. They will ask you about the content you learned about in the four key themes, and may ask about more than one theme. For these questions remember to:

- give an analytical, not a descriptive, response
- support your points with evidence
- cover the whole time period specified in the question
- come to a substantiated judgement.

Was Brezhnev's style of leadership the main reason for growing political stagnation in the USSR in the years 1964-82? (20 marks)

Strong student answer

From 1964 to 1982, the Soviet Union was led by Leonid Brezhnev. He presided over a period of growing political stagnation during which there was little change in the form of government or in the personnel that made political decisions. There was no attempt by the leadership to move towards greater public participation in the process of political decision-making. Instead, those at the top of government were happy to exercise power through a firmly established system that suited the interests of the leadership. As the leader, Brezhnev is often seen as bearing responsibility for this inertia. It was in many ways a product of his style of leadership, which sought to avoid confrontation by trusting those already in positions of power. Yet, before attributing most of the blame for this political stagnation to Brezhnev, it is important to recognise the context within which Brezhnev was operating.

There is no doubt that Brezhnev's style of leadership produced growing political stagnation, indeed it could be said to have been the desired effect that Brezhnev wished to produce, although he would have termed it 'stability'. Brezhnev wished to rule by consensus and this informed his 'trust in cadres' policy of leaving Politburo members and party subordinates to get on with their jobs unhindered. Brezhnev knew the risks of upsetting those in the Politburo or the Central Committee. He himself had taken a leading role in the removal of Khrushchev in 1964 – Brezhnev had carried a gun with him when the Politburo confronted Khrushchev and asked him to retire. He was, thus, fully aware of the need to keep the support of colleagues within the Party. He also took measures to secure a basis for his own power by promoting his friends and colleagues who he had worked with early in his career in the Ukraine. This group of Brezhnev's cronies, often referred to as the 'Dnepropetovsk mafia' were promoted to positions in the Party and government: Chernenko became a key member of the Politburo, Kirilenko was given a key job in the secretariat and Shchelokov was promoted to become Soviet Minister of the Interior. Once in position, Brezhnev rarely removed them. Most died in office.

Stagnation was enhanced by Brezhnev's weaknesses and failings as a leader, a situation that let Party officials carry out their responsibilities unhindered. He may not have been as talentless as some commentators such as Roy Medvedev have suggested, but he was certainly a man of mediocre ability. It therefore suited him to let those with ability, such as Suslov and Kosygin, get on with their jobs. Brezhnev was also a leader of limited energy. He preferred to enjoy the trappings of power rather than exercise real power. The result of this style of leadership was the development of a cult of personality that many in the Party found rather ridiculous, but satisfied the vanity of the leader. Brezhnev was awarded over a hundred medals, including the Lenin Prize for Literature for his memoirs – even though he probably did not write them himself. This style of leadership became even more pronounced after 1975, when Brezhnev suffered his first heart attack. As his health deteriorated, Brezhnev could project the semblance of power without actually doing very much. 'Not doing very much' enabled the growing political stagnation to become even more entrenched.

This is a strong introduction because it provides a clear definition of the question. It briefly outlines the issue and addresses the role of the factor in the question, namely Brezhnev's style of leadership.

This paragraph focuses on the factor specified in the question 'Brezhnev's style of leadership' and explains how this produced 'growing political stagnation'. This is a sustained and relevant approach.

The stagnation that enveloped the Soviet regime was, however, not just the responsibility of Brezhnev. Brezhnev's personal style found favour with many within the Party. After the upheavals of Stalin's period of leadership and Khrushchev's attempts to reform the Party in the early 1960s, there were many in the Party who supported, indeed welcomed, Brezhnev's style of leadership. Stalin's dealings with the Party meant many of the Party leadership could lose their lives; under Khrushchev's reforms they could lose their jobs. In this context, there were many within the Party who were happy with Brezhnev's leadership. This was their chance to exercise power in their own regions and policy areas. Brezhnev pandered to this desire by avoiding changes to Party personnel and, as a result, Party officials were usually promoted from within the regions they served. He also shied away from dismissing party officials. Moving Party and government officials around the country had been used by Stalin and Khrushchev as a way of spreading new ideas and approaches. Under Brezhnev, Party officials became comfortable in their jobs and this resulted in endemic corruption in the system. Corruption was especially common in the Central Asian republics of the USSR, where their distance from Moscow made them less likely to experience interference from central government. The 'cotton affair' in Uzbekistan and the diamond smuggling 'business' involving Brezhnev's daughter Galina were just two examples of the criminal activity that became widespread in this period. Another form of corruption that became common was the growth of nepotism. Party bosses in the regions promoted family members, regardless of their ability. Brezhnev himself set the example, securing jobs for his children and their relatives. Yet Brezhnev had only set the boundaries; it was the Party officials who took the opportunity to behave in a manner that instilled stagnation across the country.

It was the system laid down by Lenin that allowed many Party members to become involved in a system that served their own interests. The Communist Party's use of the nomenklatura system, whereby positions in the Party were filled by appointing people who were on a list of approved officials, gave considerable power to those higher up the Party structure who were the people responsible for giving approval for adding individuals to the list. This system helped Party bosses promote friends and allowed bribery to become a key feature of the system. Many people viewed the Communist Party as little more than a mechanism for getting on and furthering their career and this explains why Party membership soared from 6.9 million in 1953 to 17 million by 1980.

Brezhnev's style of leadership played a key role in producing the growing political stagnation experienced by the Soviet Union during the years 1964 to 1982. To attribute all responsibility for this stagnation to Brezhnev would, however, be unfair. There were many Party officials, including Politburo members, who supported the system that developed during these years because it worked to their advantage. Brezhnev's style of leadership was a symbol of this system as much as it was a cause. He represented a system of oligarchs, Party bosses exercising considerable power in their own areas, who were happy to enjoy their power and privileges undisturbed. Yet the Soviet Union was a one-party state and, as leader, Brezhnev and his style of leadership provided the framework that allowed others in the system to operate as they did and in this respect it was the main reason for the growing political stagnation that ensued.

This section continues the explanation by linking the role of Brezhnev's style of leadership to other factors. What is effective here is that, by linking the factors, it avoids the answer becoming a list. Although not thorough in its detail, the answer ensures that points are supported by precise examples.

The concluding paragraph makes a relevant and reasoned judgement. It addresses the key words 'main reason' in a sophisticated manner by considering the role Brezhnev's style of leadership played in its wider context.

Verdict

This is a strong answer because:

- it considers Brezhnev's style of leadership and explains how this caused growing political stagnation
- it gives a reasoned judgement on whether Brezhnev's style of leadership was the main reason by assessing the role it played in its wider context
- although it is not thorough in its use of detail, each point has precise examples to make them convincing
- it displays high-level thinking skills
- the conclusion is very strong
- the quality of written communication, logical coherence and conceptual understanding are all excellent.

Paper 1: AS Level sample answer with comments

Section B

These questions assess your understanding of the course in breadth and will cover a period of 30 years or more. They will ask you about the content you learned about in the four key themes, and may ask about more than one theme. The questions will also require you to explore a range of concepts, such as change over time, similarity and difference, as well as significance. For these questions remember to:

- identify the focus of the question
- consider the concepts you will need to explore
- support your points with evidence from across the time period specified in the question
- develop the evidence you deploy to build up your overall judgement
- come to a substantiated judgement that directly addresses the question set.

How far did the status of women in Soviet society change between 1917 and the death of Stalin in 1953? (20 marks)

Average student answer

Russian women were traditionally treated as subservient to men and were often at the receiving end of male brutality. The old Russian proverb 'The more you beat your wife the better the soup will be' sums up the way most women were viewed at the start of the 20th century. The Bolshevik Party, with its ideas of social equality, tried to change this perception. After they seized power in 1917, the Bolsheviks set up Zhenotdel, the women's branch of the Central Committee.

Through Zhenotdel, the Soviet government introduced a series of reforms aimed at women. Divorce was made easier and abortion was legalised; women were allowed greater access to further education; the principle of equal pay was upheld in December 1917 and the Soviet constitution of 1918 made women equal to men under the law. The family policy of the Bolsheviks also affected the lives of women. Maternity benefits were introduced and crèches became common-place. The civil war of 1918 to 1921 saw many women gain employment in industry. Millions of women were recruited into the factories and over 70,000 women joined the Red Army. The war disrupted women's lives, not just through changing the nature of their employment, but also by the loss of life it involved. Many women ended the civil war without a husband and struggling to support their children. Desperation led many women into prostitution.

After 1928, the lives of many women changed due to Stalin's policies of industrialisation and collectivisation. Many men left the countryside to seek employment in the growing industrial centres established under the Five-Year Plans. This trend meant that the demands of the forced collectivisation of agriculture fell mainly on women. The policy of requisitioning grain to feed the towns left women in the countryside hungry and, in areas such as Ukraine, they experienced a serious famine during the early 1930s, which left millions dead from starvation. In the new industrial centres, women were often put to work on projects that were physically demanding. Brigades of women workers were responsible for constructing sections of the Moscow underground. Living conditions in the cities were often poor due to a shortage of housing. Many women slept on floors in their workplace. There may have been a sense of community, but life was harsh. There was, at least, the promise of a new flat with running water and central heating for those women who exceeded their production targets and became 'model workers'. Educational opportunities expanded for women and many women gained skilled jobs in the health and education sectors.

This is a weak opening paragraph because it does not explicitly address the degree of 'change' that occurred. It would be better to start with a sentence like 'Attempts by the Bolsheviks to raise the status of women had brought about considerable change by 1953.'

These paragraphs are weak because they give little sense of addressing the key words of the question. Details of what happened to women are given, but there is still little focus on the status of women and how it changed. It is best to avoid a chronological description of events. Think about the key relevant points you want to make and use your knowledge of events to support them.

The Second World War put additional demands on women. Women took over jobs previously held by men who had been conscripted into the Red Army. Women also joined the Red Army; 800,000 women served in the armed forces during the Second World War, most in medical units, but also as pilots, machine-gunners and tank crews. Eighty-nine women received the Soviet Union's highest military award, Hero of the Soviet Union. Although many women were removed from their jobs after the war when the men returned to civilian life, women were beginning to be seen in a different light. The line between what was considered to be male and female work was now blurred, far more so than in the developed capitalist countries of the West. This marked a change in how women were seen in the workplace.

This section is still taking a chronological approach, but there is some awareness of 'change'. A better approach would have been to start the paragraph with the sentence, 'Traditional views of the status of women started to break down during the Second World War.'

By the 1950s, the status of women had changed a lot since 1917. Women were expected to work and could do so in a wide range of occupations. The government had taken the lead in this change by directing women into work during times of war and to support the programme of rapid industrialisation of the Five-Year Plans. Yet change was not always positive for women. Life remained harsh and women were still expected to play the key role in looking after the home and providing for the husband and children. This double burden put considerable pressure on women and made career progression difficult. The Bolshevik Party may have promoted the ideology of gender equality, but the reality was that policy towards women was decided on the basis of practicality rather than equality. The fact that there were only seven women on the Central Committee of the Party before the Second World War reflected the fact that men dominated the Party.

This section is better because it is starting to address the issue of change more explicitly. It would be even better if it explored the issue of changing status by looking at different groups of women. This answer is weakened because it tends to assume that all women experienced the same changes.

Thus, the status of women had changed since 1917. Traditional attitudes had broken down and, although the ideas of gender equality promoted by Alexandra Kollontai proved to be rather idealistic, many of the changes to women's lives raised their status and role in Soviet society.

The concluding paragraph makes a judgement that is relevant, but it lacks reasoning to make this judgement convincing. The judgement needs to be explored more to nail the point.

Verdict

This is an average answer because:

- it lacks a direct focus on the key words 'status' and 'change' in the question
- it adopts a descriptive, chronological approach
- it does not come to a strong reasoned judgement
- the analysis is generalised.

Use the feedback on this answer to rewrite it, making as many improvements as you can.

Paper 1: AS Level sample answer with comments

Section B

These questions assess your understanding of the course in breadth and will cover a period of 30 years or more. They will ask you about the content you learned about in the four key themes, and may ask about more than one theme. The questions will also require you to explore a range of concepts, such as change over time, similarity and difference, as well as significance. For these questions remember to:

- identify the focus of the question
- consider the concepts you will need to explore
- support your points with evidence from across the time period specified in the question
- develop the evidence you deploy to build up your overall judgement
- come to a substantiated judgement that directly addresses the question set.

How far did the status of women in Soviet society change between 1917 and the death of Stalin in 1953? (20 marks)

Strong student answer

Alexander Samokhalov's famous poster of 'Woman Metro builder with pneumatic drill' gives an image of a strong, powerful female worker, taking an active role in the building of socialism. This image, although propaganda, signalled the change that had occurred during Stalin's rule to the status of many women. It was starkly different from the traditional view of subservient Russian women who were little more than punchbags for their husbands. An improved status for women was promoted by communist ideology, but this was not always the key factor in bringing about change. Industrialisation and war were to exert considerable change on women's lives. By 1953, the status of different groups of women depended on the role they played in the economic structure of the country rather than on the fact that they were women.

This is a strong introduction because it provides a clear definition of the issue. It focuses on change and status and gives a sense of change through the period specified in the question.

Communist ideology promoted female equality with men and, on seizing power in 1917, the Bolsheviks were quick to attempt to change traditional Russian attitudes to the status of women. Zhenotdel, the Women's branch of the Central Committee, introduced a series of measures that included allowing abortion, making divorce easier and giving women equal status with men under the law. Despite their intention, these measures did not always raise the status of women and, in fact, often made it worse. It was hoped that by making divorce easier many women could escape a violent or neglectful husband. The reality was that most divorces were initiated by men, seeking to get out of marriages they no longer wanted. The result was that many women were abandoned by husbands who had merely to inform their wife of their divorce by postcard. By 1926, 50 percent of all marriages in Moscow were ending in divorce. The so-called 'Great Retreat' of 1936 re-established traditional family policy by tightening up on divorce and abortion. The status of women within the traditional family was raised by the government's use of awards for 'mother-heroines', the introduction of guaranteed job security for pregnant women and the extension of maternity leave to 16 weeks.

This answer is effective because it focuses on status and change rather than merely stating what the Bolsheviks did.

Urban women were likely to see the greatest change in their status through the period 1917 to 1953. The demands of war and industrialisation required more labour in the factories and this had an important impact on the status of women. During the civil war, millions of women were recruited into the factories and over 70,000 women joined the Red Army. They played a crucial role in ensuring the Red Army was well supplied with weapons and clothing. Women gained greater independence from their husbands because they were receiving wages of their own. Attitudes towards women in work changed and it became more acceptable for women to engage in industry. Nonetheless, these attitudes had limits. Many women lost their jobs after

This section focuses on the degree of change experienced by urban women and highlights that change varied through time.

the civil war as soldiers returned from the army and reclaimed their old jobs. This pattern was repeated during the Second World War, when 800,000 women served in the armed forces, most in medical units, but also as pilots, machine-gunners and tank crews. Yet this time attitudes showed some change since the civil war. What was considered women's and men's work had become blurred and this was due in part to the use of female labour during the industrialisation programme of the 1930s. The number of female workers had risen substantially in the 1930s, from three million in 1928 to over 13 million in 1940. Women dominated the workforce in light industry, especially textiles, but were increasingly found in occupations previously considered to be the preserve of male workers. Women entered the construction industry and worked in lumbering and engineering. Parts of the Moscow underground were built by brigades of female workers. The accumulation of these developments had changed attitudes towards the status of women in the towns.

Even within the urban population, the status of women could vary. The 1930s saw the emergence of a more privileged group of women, the wives of the Soviet elite. Those married to managers or Party officials did not have to enter the workforce and were encouraged, instead, to do 'social work'. This included activities such as providing curtains in workers' dormitories, providing classes on hygiene and organising cultural productions in the workplace. There was even a magazine aimed at this group, entitled 'The Socially Active Woman'. It was a subtle way of reinforcing social divisions among women and indicated that capitalist notions of class could define the status of groups of women.

Women in the countryside did not experience the same changes in their status as women in urban areas. Attitudes in rural areas were much more resistant to change, often a consequence of a lack of educational provision. Women in the countryside also suffered from the low priority given by the government to agriculture. Collectivisation was designed to make agriculture subservient to the interests of industry and the rural population in general was given less status than that of the cities. Many men had moved from the countryside to the towns in search of employment, leaving women as the majority on most collective farms. Conditions for these women remained primitive. The Second World War exacerbated the problem of a lack of men on the collectives and even as late as 1950 it was possible to find villages with no adult males.

Particularly resistant to change were the Muslim areas of Central Asia, where the polygamous, male-dominated family was well entrenched. The Bolsheviks attempted to break down these traditional attitudes and the campaign against the veiling of women in 1927 met with some success. Opportunities for Islamic women increased and female brigade leaders and tractor drivers were celebrated through films and posters. Despite these changes, traditional Islamic attitudes were slow to change and resistance was often violent.

The status of women had changed by 1953 and government policy had taken an important role in breaking down traditional social attitudes towards women. Women were less likely to be restricted to a specific, defined women's role, but this did not mean that their lives were always improved. Changes in status were also uneven: urban women, especially the wives of Party officials, saw the greatest changes. The status of women in rural areas was little changed, a reflection of not just traditional attitudes, but of the government's low priority for agriculture.

This section is effective because it draws attention to the different groups of women within the urban population. This is a sophisticated way of dealing with change.

The answer is now examining the different changes affecting rural women. The focus is sustained on 'change' and the degree of change.

This section is strong because it continues to explore the issue of changing status of women by considering different groups. It does not assume all women experienced the same changes.

The concluding paragraph makes a judgement that stems from the explanation given in the answer. It addresses the key words 'how far' in a more sophisticated manner by considering the degree of change on the various groups of Soviet women.

Verdict

This is a strong answer because:

- it focuses on 'status' and 'change'
- it addresses 'how far' by looking at the degree of change and the experience of different groups of women
- it has precise examples to make the points convincing
- the conclusion makes a clear, reasoned judgement
- the quality of written communication, logical coherence and conceptual understanding are all excellent.

Paper 1: AS Level sample answer with comments

Section C

These questions require you to read and analyse two extracts carefully in order to develop a response which examines and makes an informed judgement about different interpretations. The best answers:

- need to show an understanding of the extracts and identify key points of interpretation
- deploy own knowledge to develop points emerging from the extracts and provide necessary context
- develop a judgement after developing and weighing up different interpretations.

Study Extracts 1 and 2 on page 120 before you answer this question.

Historians have different views about the fall of the Soviet Union. Analyse and evaluate the extracts and use your knowledge of the issues to explain your answer to the following question.

How far do you agree with the view that it was economic weakness in the years 1985–91 that brought about the fall of the Soviet Union? (20 marks)

Average student answer

The economic weaknesses of the USSR helped to bring about the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. Gorbachev proved unable to bring about an improvement to the slowdown in economic growth that had plagued the country since the fall of Khrushchev and had become a real problem during the Brezhnev years. There were, however, lots of other reasons for the fall of the Soviet Union, such as the rise of nationalism, but the weaknesses in the Soviet economy were very important.

Extract 1 by P. Hanson tells us that Gorbachev's reforms tried to 'decentralise decision-making', make 'legitimate the unplanned, non-state economy' and 'facilitate trade and investment'. It goes on to state that these reforms were 'not part of a plan already conceived', but were part of a policy of 'trial-and-error'. Hanson believes that these reforms failed to 'secure a significant and sustained improvement in economic performance'. The result, according to Hanson, was 'a stagnating economy' that had 'unpleasant consequences'.

In Extract 2, Brown gives a different view. Like Hanson, he does think that economic weakness caused problems for the regime. Brown describes the Soviet economy as having 'severe economic problems', which agrees with Hanson's view of 'unpleasant consequences', but he disagrees by stating that the poor economic performance did not 'by itself lead to the downfall of a highly authoritarian regime' like that of the Soviet Union. Brown's view is that the economic failure occurred at a time when other reforms were attempted, such as political reforms, which put a lot of pressure on the government. Brown identifies these other problems as 'liberalisation and democratisation'. It was, according to Brown, because of these pressures all being unleashed at the same time that the Soviet Union collapsed. As Brown states, the Soviet Union would have been able to hold on to power if it had continued to use 'more sophisticated systems of control', such as propaganda and terror.

This section is better because the student is starting to show an understanding that they are dealing with differing interpretations and it cross-references the extracts to show how the emphasis in each interpretation is different.

It would be better to develop these differences by using own knowledge to explain the points raised in the extracts.

Although this paragraph is relevant to the issue, it does not give a sense that the answer is considering an interpretation of an issue where there is a debate.

It would be better to start with a sentence like 'The role of the weaknesses in the Soviet economy in bringing about the fall of the Soviet Union has been a source of much debate.'

This paragraph is weak because it merely restates the source. A better approach would be to explain what Hanson means in the extract and use own knowledge to illustrate his points. For example, how did Gorbachev 'decentralise decision-making' and what were the 'unpleasant consequences'?

The economic weaknesses of the Soviet economy were made worse by the reforms of Gorbachev. His proposal for economic perestroika, or restructuring, attempted to bring market mechanisms into the economy to try to increase production and therefore put more goods into the shops. He encouraged joint ventures with foreign companies, loosened state controls over wages and prices, and encouraged the setting up of small-scale private enterprises called co-operatives.

These measures led to a small increase in production during the period 1986–87, but state interference remained an obstacle to those wishing to set up their own enterprise. Products, especially foodstuffs, were diverted from state shops, where prices were low, to co-operatives that charged a much higher price. This produced inflation and food shortages, which caused considerable hardship for many people. By the end of 1989, the Soviet economy was massively in debt and approaching crisis point. Gorbachev's promise of an improvement in consumer goods for the population had not been achieved and strikes became common as workers protested over unpaid wages and food shortages. Gorbachev's failure to bring about an improved economic situation undermined his political power and position. The wave of popular discontent was often directed at the Communist Party and Gorbachev, its leader. If communism could not produce the material needs of the people there seemed little point in using it as the basis of their political system. Calls for the dismantling of the Soviet economy increased. When the government decided to implement a rapid transition to a market-led economy in 1989, the economy collapsed. Soviet output declined by one-fifth between 1990 and 1991. Perestroika had produced catastroika, an economic catastrophe.

It is clear that the weaknesses of the Soviet economy played an important part in undermining support for the Communist Party and the Soviet regime it had established. This is acknowledged by Brown when he states that it was 'a very important contributory factor' in the break-up of the Soviet Union. Hanson would clearly support this conclusion, stating that the USSR would be 'unable to maintain its status as a world power' and he makes a direct link with 'domestic unrest'. It is true that economic failures did help produce serious dissatisfaction with the regime and in the end discredited the Soviet economic system of centralised planning. This resulted in sections of the population turning to liberal reformers, such as Yeltsin, or nationalist groups, such as the Sajudis in the Baltic republics, as a better guarantee of improving their living standards and economic well-being. These developments were helped because, as Brown rightly points out, liberalisation and democratisation occurred at the same time as economic failure. Thus, economic failure was a major factor in the fall of the Soviet Union.

These sections have detailed own knowledge on the topic, but the information is not used to assess the validity of the interpretations in the extracts. It would be better to consider whether this information supports Brown's interpretation or that of Hanson.

The concluding paragraph is better because it integrates use of the extracts with own knowledge. It also makes a relevant judgement that provides some assessment of the validity of the differing interpretations. The answer would have been better if this approach had been adopted throughout.

Verdict

This is an average answer because:

- it tends to describe what is in the extracts rather than drawing points from them about their interpretation
- it does not explain the key features of the interpretations in the extracts
- it does not use own knowledge to develop points raised by the extracts
- it does not assess the validity of the interpretations by using own knowledge, except briefly at the end.

Use the feedback on this answer to rewrite it, making as many improvements as you can.

Paper 1: AS Level sample answer with comments

Section C

These questions require you to read and analyse two extracts carefully in order to develop a response which examines and makes an informed judgement about different interpretations. The best answers:

- need to show an understanding of the extracts and identify the key points of interpretation
- deploy own knowledge to develop point emerging from extracts and provide necessary context
- develop a judgement after developing and weighing up different interpretations.

Study Extracts 1 and 2 on page 120 before you answer this question.

Historians have different views about the fall of the Soviet Union. Analyse and evaluate the extracts and use your knowledge of the issues to explain your answer to the following question.

How far do you agree with the view that it was economic weakness in the years 1985–91 that brought about the fall of the Soviet Union? (20 marks)

Strong student answer

The role of the weakness of the Soviet economy, and ultimately economic failure, in bringing about the collapse of the Soviet Union has been the subject of much debate. While it is difficult to deny the fact that underlying economic problems seriously weakened the Soviet regime, there is a range of opinions on the significance of these problems and the impact they had on the stability of the regime. Hanson, in Extract 1, draws attention to 'unpleasant consequences' of the economic weaknesses, and Brown, in Extract 2, seemingly agrees when he writes about 'severe economic problems'. Nonetheless, there is disagreement over whether this was a crucial factor in the collapse of the Soviet Union. It is difficult to assess the role of economic failure without placing it within the wider context of other developments happening simultaneously within the Soviet Union during the years 1985–91.

This is a strong introduction because it shows an awareness of dealing with interpretations that need to be assessed for their validity. The answer is already making comparisons between the two extracts.

Extract 1 highlights the key problems of the Soviet economy and how Gorbachev's economic reforms made them worse. It states that the plans to breathe new life into the stagnating Soviet economy were poorly planned by reference to 'trial-and-error' and 'not part of a plan already conceived'. This view certainly has validity because it was typical of how Gorbachev worked as Soviet leader. His policies changed quickly through his time as leader. He attempted to improve the economy through a programme of discipline and acceleration, using the Twelfth Five-Year Plan of 1986 to 1990, but when this failed to produce little more than a minor improvement in productivity, Gorbachev decided that a more radical approach of economic restructuring (perestroika) was needed. As Hanson states, this merely produced 'unpleasant consequences', a reference to the food shortages that became pronounced as goods were diverted to private traders who could sell for much higher prices than the state shops. Brown supports this part of the interpretation of economic weakness under Gorbachev by referring to 'severe economic problems'. For those Soviet citizens reliant on state jobs and fixed wages, this situation caused extreme hardship and this boiled over into discontent. Hanson acknowledges this trend when he mentions 'domestic unrest'. This unrest was to materialise during 1989 when a wave of strikes occurred throughout the USSR, especially in the state mining industries. These state employees blamed the Communist Party, their employer, for the problems.

This paragraph is effective because it explains key features of the interpretation in the extract and uses own knowledge to do this. Own knowledge is used to assess the validity of the interpretation.

Where Extract 2 offers a different interpretation of the impact of economic failure is on the point as to whether these problems would necessarily bring down the Soviet Union. While Extract 1 mentions the impact of a stagnating economy on the Soviet Union's ability to maintain itself as

a world superpower and the link to 'domestic unrest', Extract 2 suggests that these difficulties would not have brought down the Soviet Union on their own. Brown states categorically, 'the link between economic failure and turning out a government which exists in democracies does not apply in the same way to authoritarian or totalitarian regimes.' What he also acknowledges is that the USSR was no longer the authoritarian regime it had been previously. Brown puts the blame on two other of Gorbachev's reforms: 'liberalisation and democratisation'. 'Liberalisation' is a reference to Gorbachev's policy of glasnost, or openness, which had a powerful impact on the population. Glasnost was to become a vehicle for attacking the Soviet system and involved exposures of corruption and nepotism within the Party apparatus. Incidents, such as the massacre of Polish officers in the Katyn forest in 1940 and environmental disasters such as the Aral Sea, had a profound impact on the Communist Party, which was blamed for carrying out these actions. Thus, economic failure, which according to Brown need not, on its own, have been fatal to the Soviet Union, came at the same time as the political authority of the regime collapsed. It was the combination of these developments that proved too much for the regime to withstand. The Communist Party was discredited and moves to democratisation provided opportunities for others to take advantage of the decline of the Communist Party.

Brown mentions that without these political changes, the manifestations of dissatisfaction would have been on a 'more modest scale' and dealt with in the traditional way. This is a reference to the extensive system of social control through surveillance and intimidation used by the 'unreformed' Soviet regime. Hanson refers to 'decentralised decision-making' in the economy; when this approach was applied to the political context, the Soviet Union started to fall apart. Gorbachev's reforms gave an impetus to nationalist groups to take advantage of a Party in serious decline. Democratisation made it possible for other political groups to become established and challenge the Communist Party. With the Communist Party increasingly discredited, critics pushed for real democracy. In March 1990, Gorbachev finally repealed Article 6 of the Soviet Constitution and thus ended the Party's monopoly on power. Other political parties could now be established to contest elections. Boris Yeltsin was one of the more liberal reformers who, increasingly disillusioned with the slow pace of economic reform, left the Communist Party to form his own grouping, Democratic Platform. In the individual republics of the Soviet Union, national groups formed their own organisations that pushed for the break-up of the Soviet Union and their own independence. In this sense, Hanson's reference, Soviet workers might 'begin to behave like Poles', became a reality; economic discontent was merely a prelude to achieving the end of the communist system.

The view that the economic weaknesses of the Soviet system brought about the fall of the Soviet Union can only be partly supported. As Hanson states, economic failure did produce 'unpleasant consequences', but Brown rightly points out that economic failures on their own did not bring about Soviet collapse. It was the fact that these economic problems occurred within the context of other developments, such as glasnost, democratisation and the resurgence of nationalism, that in combination worked to discredit and undermine the entire Soviet system.

These sections continue the explanation and evaluation of the interpretations in the extracts by using own knowledge linked to their key features.

The concluding paragraph makes a relevant and reasoned judgement. It addresses the validity of the interpretation offered in the question.

Verdict

This is a strong answer because:

- it has a sharp focus on the question
- it explains the key features of the interpretations in the extracts
- own knowledge is used to explain points in the interpretations
- a reasoned judgement is made that assesses the validity of the interpretation that the weakness of the Soviet economy in the years 1985–91 brought about the fall of the Soviet Union
- the quality of written communication, logical coherence and conceptual understanding are all excellent.

Preparing for your A Level Paper 1 exam

Advance planning

1. Draw up a timetable for your revision and try to keep to it. Spread your timetable over a number of weeks, and aim to cover four or five topics each week.
2. Spend longer on topics that you have found difficult, and revise them several times.
3. Above all, do not try to limit your revision by attempting to 'question spot'. Try to be confident about all aspects of your Paper 1 work, because this will ensure that you have a choice of questions in Sections A and B.

Paper 1 overview:

AL Paper 1	Time: 2 hours 15 minutes	
Section A	Answer 1 question from a choice of 2	20 marks
Section B	Answer 1 question from a choice of 2	20 marks
Section C	Answer 1 compulsory interpretations question	20 marks
	Total marks =	**60 marks**

You should familiarise yourself with the layout of the paper by looking at the examples published by Edexcel. The questions for each section are followed by eight pages of lined paper where you should write your answer.

Section A and Section B questions

The essay questions in Sections A and B are similar in form. They ask you to reach a judgement on an aspect of the course you have studied, and will deal with one or more historical concepts of change, continuity, similarity, difference, cause, consequence and significance. The question stems which will be used will include 'To what extent…', 'How far…', 'How significant was…' and so on. You should consider the issue raised by the question, develop your answer by looking at other relevant points, and reach a judgement in your conclusion.

The main difference between Section A and Section B questions will be the timespan of the questions. Section A questions will cover a period of ten years or more, while Section B questions will be concerned with at least one-third of the period you have studied.

A Section A question for Option 1E might read 'How far was high expenditure on the armed forces responsible for economic decline in the USSR in the years 1964–82?' Your answer should consider the issue of expenditure on the armed forces, look at other issues such as agricultural decline, falling productivity in industry, and Brezhnev's reluctance to undertake economic reforms, before reaching an overall judgement on the question.

A Section B question on the same paper will cover a longer period of time, but have a similar shape. For example, 'How successful were the government's social policies in improving the lives of the Soviet people in the years 1917–64?' Here you should consider various successes, such as full employment, education and healthcare, but also point out policies which were less successful, such as housing and different policies towards women over time. You should conclude by reaching a judgement on the question.

Section C questions

There is no choice in Section C, which is concerned with the historical interpretations you have studied linked to the question 'What explains the fall of the USSR, c1985–91?' You will be given two extracts totalling around 400 words (printed separately) and the question will take the form 'How convincing do you find the view that…?' There is no need to use source analysis skills such as making inferences or considering provenance for Section C answers. You should approach your answer by analysing both extracts separately, and then use your own knowledge to support, and to counter, the view given in the question, before reaching an overall judgement.

Use of time

This is an issue that you should discuss with your teachers and fellow students, but here are some suggestions for you.

1. Do not write solidly for 45 minutes on each question. For Section A and B answers you should spend a few minutes working out what the question is asking you to do, and drawing up a plan of your answer. This is especially important for Section B answers, which cover an extended period of time.
2. For Section C it is essential that you have a clear understanding of the content of each extract and the points that each extract is making. Read each extract carefully and underline important points. You might decide to spend up to ten minutes reading the extracts and drawing up your plan, and 35 minutes writing your answer.

Preparing for your A Level exams

Paper 1: A Level sample answer with comments

Section A

These questions assess your understanding of the period in breadth. They will ask you about the content you learned about in the four key themes, and may ask about more than one theme. For these questions remember to:

- give an analytical, not a descriptive, response
- support your points with evidence
- cover the whole time period specified in the question
- come to a substantiated judgement.

How far did the Soviet regime succeed in ensuring that culture and the arts served the interests of the Communist Party between 1917 and 1953? (20 marks)

Average student answer

Cultural activity and the arts provided both opportunities and threats to the Soviet regime. Many writers and artists thrived on attacking the established authorities and, while this had been useful to the Bolsheviks in 1917, once the Communist Party became the established authority they demanded that culture and the arts serve the interests of the Soviet regime. By 1953, Stalin had established a high degree of uniformity over culture and the arts with the imposition of Socialist Realism on all of its aspects.

The Soviet government used a range of methods to try and control culture and the arts. Lenin set up the Commissariat of Enlightenment under Anatoly Lunachevsky. The purpose of the organisation was to promote a new type of cultural activity that highlighted the interests and achievements of the industrial worker. One of the leading figures in this movement was Alexander Bogdanov, who argued that the state should apply new technology to create a 'Proletarian Culture' or 'Prolekult'. A key strand of 'Prolekult' was the work of constructivists, who wished to build a new world that reflected the values of socialism. This led to workers and peasants being encouraged to produce their own culture, from writing their own stories to putting on theatre productions. The magazine 'Smithy' was established, which contained poems about machines and factories. The government also made use of festivals to develop a new culture based on socialist values. A re-enactment of the storming of the Winter Palace using over 8,000 people illustrated a focus on street theatre that reinforced socialist values. Even architecture was used to encourage communal living in apartment blocks.

The Communist Party also encouraged more experimental art forms, known as avant-garde. New trends such as Modernism and Futurism were encouraged and this led to a flourishing in abstract art styles. Mayakovsky was set to work producing slogans and posters for the government. His work was new and original, as was the work of the painters Malevich and Kandinsky. Many of those who worked in this atmosphere of innovation were not Communist Party members but 'Fellow Travellers', who nonetheless shared many values with the regime. In the theatre the avant-garde movement was led by Vyacheslav Meyerhold, who produced the

This introduction shows some awareness of the focus of the question, but it does not explore the central issue very far. It tends to give a straightforward assertion.

It would be better to start by defining 'the interests of the Communist Party' and considering the degree of success and whether this success increased or not through the period specified in the question.

These paragraphs have a lot of good precise detail, but they do not address the key words in the question. The link between cultural policy and how it was designed to serve the interests of the Communist Party is not made. There is also little attempt to consider whether these policies actually succeeded in achieving their aims.

It would be better to start each paragraph by looking at a specific aim of the Communist Party's cultural policy and use the information to explain how actions were designed to further this aim, before judging its level of success.

pageant 'Mystery Bouffe' (1918) depicting the workers defeating their exploiters. The regime encouraged this experimentation until Stalin launched the Cultural Revolution at the end of the 1920s.

The Cultural Revolution was an attempt to remove all aspects of the old 'bourgeois' world from society, and culture became a key battlefield in this revolution. Young enthusiastic Communists from Komsomol were encouraged to root out and attack 'bourgeois' elements and they did this by actions, such as disrupting suspect plays by booing and whistling. In literature, the Russian Association of Proletarian Writers (RAPP) made increasingly bitter attacks on the Fellow Travellers and condemned the decadent individualism of writers who adopted new experimental techniques. Influenced by the ideas of the prolekult movement, RAPP encouraged writers to produce books that stressed the achievements of the workers and Kataev's novel 'Time Forward' (1932) was a good example of this. It was about a record-breaking shift at Magnitogorsk steel works. Works like this were used to support the programme of rapid industrialisation that had been started by Stalin's First Five-Year Plan. As the demands of industrialisation increased, Stalin realised that greater control was needed to ensure the Soviet population rose to the severe challenges faced during the enormous economic changes of the 1930s. The result was a tightening of control through the imposition of Socialist Realism over all aspects of culture and the arts. Under Socialist Realism there was to be no experimentation with form. Art was used by the regime to project ideal images of life under the Five-Year Plans. Socialist Realism produced posters, paintings and sculptures that presented images of the worker and peasant, often together, working for socialism and gaining strength through their endeavours.

This section is better because it is starting to address the issue of 'interests of the Communist Party'. The aims of cultural policy during the 1930s are highlighted, but there is still no discussion of whether they succeeded. Some precise examples of Socialist Realism would help here.

Socialist Realism had an impact on music, which was expected to serve the interests of Stalin. If it didn't, the consequences could be harsh. In 1935, the composer Shostakovich was condemned when Stalin walked out of a performance of his opera 'Lady Macbeth of Mtensk' (a politically correct story of adultery) due to 'discordant notes'. In popular music, military songs were favoured more than jazz. In architecture, Socialist Realism promoted the style known as 'Stalinist baroque', better known as 'wedding cake' architecture, which made use of classical lines. Many public buildings were built in this style, the best example being Moscow University. The Moscow Metro system was another good example of Stalinist baroque. A cult of personality was used in many branches of the arts to present an idealised image of Stalin. Anything critical of Stalin was not tolerated.

This section has precise examples, but it has lost focus, again, on the aims of the policy. 'Success' is implied rather than discussed.

Although there was a degree of liberalisation of culture and the arts during the Second World War, any signs of greater freedom were quickly dispelled by Zhdanov's attack on all aspects of Western culture after 1945. Even though Zhdanov died in 1948, these severe restrictions continued. Thus, the Communist Party had been able to extend its control over all aspects of culture and the arts. The methods that the regime used changed through the period and early tolerance of experimentation gave way to a more restrictive approach that reflected Stalin's increasingly paranoid personality. By 1953, culture was firmly in the hands of the regime.

The concluding paragraph makes a relevant judgement, but it deals with the focus of the question in a straightforward manner rather than exploring the issue with developed reasoning.

It would be better to judge success against the 'interests of the Communist Party'.

Verdict

This is an average answer because:

- it has limited focus on the key words in the question
- it does not always use precise evidence to back up points
- it does not explore the central issue in the question in any depth.

Use the feedback on this answer to rewrite it, making as many improvements as you can.

Paper 1: A Level sample answer with comments

Section A

These questions assess your understanding of the period in breadth. They will ask you about the content you learned about in the four key themes, and may ask about more than one theme. For these questions remember to:

- give an analytical, not a descriptive, response
- support your points with evidence
- cover the whole time period specified in the question
- come to a substantiated judgement.

How far did the Soviet regime succeed in ensuring that culture and the arts served the interests of the Communist Party between 1917 and 1953? (20 marks)

Strong student answer

Although Lenin had recognised the potential of arts and culture to serve the interests of the regime, it was Stalin who stated that artists were engineers of the human soul. By this he meant that art and cultural activities could be used to mould the minds and beliefs of the Soviet people in the interests of the government. These interests evolved through the period 1917–53, from the initial aim of destroying bourgeois culture to establishing a new socialist, proletarian culture that would reinforce the values of the Communist Party. Despite the extensive range of government direction over culture and the arts, Communist policies did not always succeed, and at the edges there was always an element of non-conformity.

In the initial years of Communist rule, the Party under Lenin used culture and the arts to attack the old values of bourgeois culture. This was an important part of the Party's consolidation of power and reflected their concerns of counter-revolutionary activity during the period of the civil war and its aftermath. The Commissariat of Enlightenment had been established in 1917, under Anatoly Lunachevsky, with the purpose of promoting a new type of cultural activity that highlighted the interests and achievements of the industrial worker. 'Proletarian Culture' or 'Prolekult' was encouraged, illustrating themes such as the application of technology to the needs of the industrial worker. Instead of classical 'high' culture, prolekult was rooted in the people. Much of this output was of low quality, but it did succeed in involving more of the population in cultural activities. Street theatre and poetry became popular, many workers submitting their own poems to magazines, such as 'Smithy'.

The attempt to remove the influence of old cultural values involved the Party's encouragement of more experimental art forms, known as avant-garde. New trends, such as Modernism and Futurism, flourished, leading to experimentation with abstract art styles. Artists, such as Mayakovsky, produced innovative work, but the message in the art was often unclear and open to individual interpretation. This concerned the Party, who wished to promote the values of socialism in a more direct manner. There was a danger that art and culture would promote anti-establishment views, something the Communist Party became more concerned about once it had become the establishment. The fact that many of the avant-garde artists were 'fellow-travellers' rather than committed communists also caused concern.

Deviation from the interests of the Party could not be tolerated in the context of the Five-Year Plans after 1928. The Party's policy of transforming the Soviet economy at speed meant that the government needed culture and the arts to motivate and inspire the Soviet population to ever-increasing efforts and the endurance of extreme hardship. Without immediate material advantage for the population, culture and the arts became vital instruments of ensuring compliance in the modernisation of the Soviet economy. The Cultural Revolution was a method of mobilising the young in support of socialism. They were encouraged to root out and attack 'bourgeois' elements and did this by actions, such as disrupting suspect plays by booing and whistling. In literature, the

This is a strong introduction because it provides a clear focus on the key words in the question. There is an awareness of 'the interests of the Communist Party' and a consideration of whether the regime succeeded.

These paragraphs focus on identifying the interests of the Communist Party and then developing each point to explain how they were promoted through culture and the arts. The degree of success is discussed. This is a sustained and relevant approach.

Russian Association of Proletarian Writers (RAPP) made increasingly bitter attacks on the Fellow Travellers and condemned the decadent individualism of writers who adopted new experimental techniques. The type of writing preferred by the regime included Kataev's novel 'Time Forward' (1932), about a record-breaking shift at Magnitogorsk steel works. Works like this were used to support the programme of rapid industrialisation that had been started by Stalin's First Five-Year Plan. As the demands of industrialisation increased, Stalin realised that greater control was needed to ensure the Soviet population rose to the severe challenges faced during the enormous economic changes of the 1930s. The result was a tightening of control through the imposition of Socialist Realism on all aspects of culture and the arts. Art was used by the regime to project ideal images of life under the Five-Year Plans. Socialist Realism produced posters, paintings and sculptures that presented images of the worker and peasant, often together, working for socialism and gaining strength through their endeavours. Socialist Realism combined with Stalin's growing cult of personality. Thus, images of Stalin were linked to the great projects of the Five-Year Plans, such as the White Sea Canal and Dneiper Dam. Stalin was promoted as the architect of industrialisation and the moderniser of the Soviet Union. It is difficult to judge the full success of Socialist Realism, but there is plenty of evidence of young Communist Party members joining projects to help build a new socialist future. The huge Magnitogorsk industrial centre was one of many projects swamped by volunteers inspired by Soviet propaganda.

Culture and the arts worked best when the interests of the Party built upon attitudes and values already existing in the population and a good example of this is when the government tapped into feelings of patriotism and Russian nationalism during the Second World War. Eisenstein's film 'Alexander Nevsky' became a hit with the public. Its story of Nevsky's successful stand against an invasion by Teutonic Knights in the 13th century inspired the Soviet population to stand firm against the Nazi invasion of 1941. Given the huge losses (over 20 million) endured by the Soviet people, this was no mean feat. Public concerns over the threat of invasion and war were reinforced after 1945. The government built on these fears during the Cold War to promote attacks on foreigners through the arts, which became known as the Zhdanovschina. Rigid control over the arts and culture was firmly maintained and artists, such as Shostakovich, were heavily restricted. Fear of foreign invasion and war, after Russia's experience of the First World War, civil war and the Nazi invasion, was a potent force that the regime could use to serve its own foreign policy against the West during the Cold War.

Given the excessive use of terror that the Soviet regime became infamous for, it is tempting to think that Soviet control was all-pervasive. In reality, not all artists were prepared to go along with the dictates of the Communist Party. Some artists criticised the regime, often at considerable personal cost. Others refused to play the game and opted for what Isaac Babel called the genre of silence. One of Russia's greatest poets, Anna Akhamatova, gave up writing poetry for publication during Stalin's rule. Works critical of the regime had little choice but to become part of an underground network, operating out of the eyes of the secret police. Nonetheless, it would be a fair assessment to state that, as a result of the rigid state control exercised over culture and the arts, the Communist Party was to ensure that its political and economic interests were served with considerable success.

These sections continue the explanation. There is good use of precise examples and success is discussed. Government policy is placed in its wider context.

The concluding paragraph makes a relevant and reasoned judgement. It addresses the key words 'interests' and 'success' and explores them in some depth and with some sophistication.

Verdict

This is strong answer because:

- it considers the precise focus of the question by explaining how culture and the arts were used to 'serve the interests of the Communist Party'
- it gives a reasoned judgement on whether cultural policy was a success
- it places culture and the arts into their wider context
- although the answer is not thorough in its use of detail, each point has precise examples to make it convincing
- it displays high-level thinking skills
- the quality of written communication, logical coherence and conceptual understanding are all excellent.

Paper 1: A Level sample answer with comments

Section B

These questions assess your understanding of the course in breadth and will cover a period of 30 years or more. They will ask you about the content you learned about in the four key themes, and may ask about more than one theme. The questions will also require you to explore a range of concepts, such as change over time, similarity and difference, as well as significance. For these questions remember to:

- identify the focus of the question
- consider the concepts you will need to explore
- support your points with evidence from across the time period specified in the question
- develop the evidence you deploy to build up your overall judgement
- come to a substantiated judgement that directly addresses the question set.

To what extent did the economic reforms of Khrushchev and Brezhnev address the fundamental weaknesses of the Soviet economy between 1955 and 1982? (20 marks)

Average student answer

Both Khrushchev and Brezhnev tried to reform the economy of the Soviet Union. Under Khrushchev this involved the launching of the Virgin Lands Scheme in agriculture and the Seven-Year Plan of 1959–65, which focused on the promotion of light industry. Under Brezhnev, the focus on agriculture and light industry continued. Consumer goods became more plentiful, leading to a rise in Soviet living standards. Not all proposed reforms were implemented, or were successful when they were. The Kosygin reforms of 1965 were watered down to the point where their impact was extremely limited.

In 1957, Khrushchev set up 105 Regional Economic Councils to supervise enterprises. It was an attempt to move some decision-making from the centre to regional bases, which, it was hoped, would be able to take more account of local circumstances. Managers of industrial enterprises were given more influence in their factories. Khrushchev disliked the fact that they were merely 'robots of Moscow'. To encourage initiative they were allowed to keep 40 percent of the profits made by their factory to invest as they wished in their enterprise. Many of these reforms were promoted by the Liberman Plan of 1962, which called for greater autonomy for local managers. The influence of Khrushchev on economic policy was evident in the Seven-Year Plan. The government pushed ahead with transforming the fuel and chemical industries. This involved a shift of emphasis from coal to oil and gas. The focus on the chemical industry was linked to the increased targets for consumer goods. The production of synthetic fibres was to rise from 166,000 tons in 1958 to a target of 666,000 tons by 1965. Substantial rises were also targeted in footwear, natural fabrics and housing. The annual growth rate of the Soviet economy in the 1950s was 7.1 percent. This seemed impressive compared with the US growth rate of 2.9 percent, but the Soviet economy still lagged behind because its economic base was smaller.

Agriculture received a lot of attention from Khrushchev. In 1955, individual collectives were given greater powers to make decisions at local level. Flexibility over how directions from the Ministry of Agriculture were implemented was allowed. The MTS were abolished. Collectives were increased in size, many becoming large agro-industrial villages that linked food production with food processing. These units made some sense in terms of creating greater economies of scale. They also enabled much greater investment in agriculture to take place. There was a rapid increase in mechanisation, fertilisers and irrigation. Nonetheless, these much larger farming units proved deeply unpopular with the peasants, who felt more divorced from the land they worked.

This introduction shows some awareness of the whole period and identifies some of the key economic reforms that need to be explored in the answer. Unfortunately, the introduction does not define the economic weaknesses of the Soviet economy.

It would be better to start to open up the issue by defining these weaknesses and considering the extent to which economic reforms addressed them.

These paragraphs have a lot of good, precise detail, but they do not use this information to explain how the reforms tackled key economic weaknesses.

It would be better to start each paragraph by identifying the economic weaknesses that the reforms were trying to address.

The most famous of Khrushchev's agricultural initiatives was the Virgin Lands Scheme. Introduced in 1954, it encouraged the opening up of new areas to agricultural production. Six million acres of land were brought under cultivation with considerable investment. Over 120,000 tractors were provided for the scheme.

Attempts to reform the economy were continued under Brezhnev. In 1965, Alexei Kosygin, the Prime Minister, launched a series of reforms that aimed to improve productivity. His reforms, like those of Khrushchev, gave incentives to enterprise managers to use their resources more productively. He also attempted to make central planning take more notice of cost and profit rather than the Stalinist approach of using quantity produced as the main indicator of economic success. Kosygin's reforms had much to commend them, but little was achieved. The reforms were blocked by the officials who had to implement them. These officials were too conservative in their attitude to take risks and managers preferred to stay with safe and tried methods. On a more positive note, Brezhnev encouraged greater use of scientific research to ensure the latest technology was applied to production. Khrushchev's push for greater consumer goods was continued by Brezhnev, and the Ninth Five-Year Plan placed a particular emphasis on this. Goals were not fulfilled, but the growth achieved was still impressive and living standards rose.

In agriculture, Brezhnev reversed Khrushchev's decentralising schemes for agriculture. Power was returned to the Ministry of Agriculture and the Virgin Lands Scheme was dropped. The Politburo did accept that agriculture needed heavy investment and this feature of previous policy continued. By 1976, 26 percent of all investment was in agriculture, but this investment was producing fewer returns.

Both Khrushchev and Brezhnev recognised that the Soviet economy needed to be improved, and introduced reforms to try to address this. These reforms did mark a shift away from the focus on heavy industry and central control that had dominated the economic system under Stalin, but their success in raising production and productivity was limited.

These sections are less detailed, but contain good points that could have been explored further. The use of incentives is mentioned. This could have provided an opportunity to explore the problems of central planning.

The concluding paragraph makes a straightforward, relevant judgement and reveals that the student's understanding is much better than their answer indicates. The shift from heavy industry and central control – two fundamental weaknesses – could have been explored in depth in the essay.

Verdict

This is an average answer because:

- it has limited focus on 'fundamental weaknesses'
- it does not use precise detail to explain points
- it does not explore the central issue in the question in any depth.

Use the feedback on this answer to rewrite it, making as many improvements as you can.

Paper 1: A Level sample answer with comments

Section B

These questions assess your understanding of the course in breadth and will cover a period of 30 years or more. They will ask you about the content you learned about in the four key themes, and may ask about more than one theme. The questions will also require you to explore a range of concepts, such as change over time, similarity and difference, as well as significance. For these questions remember to:

- identify the focus of the question
- consider the concepts you will need to explore
- support your points with evidence from across the time period in the question
- develop the evidence you deploy to build up your overall judgement
- come to a substantiated judgement that directly addresses the question set.

To what extent did the economic reforms of Khrushchev and Brezhnev address the fundamental weaknesses of the Soviet economy between 1955 and 1982? (20 marks)

Strong student answer

Stalin had bequeathed an economic system to his successors that had been successful in bringing about rapid industrialisation and providing the materials necessary to ensure that the USSR survived a World War. Nonetheless, it was a system that contained fundamental weaknesses. It was rigidly controlled by an army of planners based in Moscow that reduced local managers to the role of 'robots'. It was a system that discouraged initiative and hampered flexibility in meeting changing demands. The focus on heavy industry, at the expense of consumer goods and agriculture, did little to help the Soviet Union meet the needs of its population and raise living standards. It was these weaknesses that both Khrushchev and Brezhnev attempted to address.

This is a strong introduction because it provides a strong focus on the key words in the question. There is an identification of the weaknesses that Khrushchev and Brezhnev attempted to address.

Khrushchev's economic reforms were designed to tackle the problems of the rigid command economy. It had become a vast bureaucratic system of administrators based in Moscow that stifled initiative. The system was clumsy and wasteful and found it particularly difficult to deal with unforeseen events. To deal with these issues, Khrushchev pushed ahead with a series of reforms that included setting up 105 Regional Economic Councils (Sovnarkhozy) to supervise enterprises. It was an attempt to move some decision-making from the centre to regional bases, which, it was hoped, would be able to take more account of local circumstances. Managers of industrial enterprises were given more influence in their factories in an attempt to unleash initiative and creativity. To encourage initiative they were allowed to keep 40 percent of the profits made by their factory to invest as they wished in their enterprise. These changes were pushed further by the Liberman Plan of 1962. These reforms soon ran into opposition from Party officials. Many local managers, used to the coercion and terror of the Stalin years, proved unable and unwilling to take risks. At the centre of the planning organisation, Gosplan became overwhelmed with work yet with less influence to direct decisions. The division of the Party apparatus into industrial and agricultural branches in 1962 merely added to the confusion.

This section is effective because it defines a fundamental weakness of the Soviet economy and examines how successful Khrushchev was in addressing it.

The attempt to move the Soviet economy away from the so-called 'metal-eaters' towards consumer goods and light industry was evident in the Seven-Year Plan. This approach met with some success. In 1959, Khrushchev had boasted to the West, 'We will bury you.' This claim to be able to overtake the West in technology and consumer goods was far-fetched, but there were impressive achievements even if goals were not met. There was more choice for consumers, but the quality of the goods was often poor. The annual growth rate of the Soviet economy in the 1950s was 7.1 percent, but problems remained, with poor labour productivity, inefficiency and waste.

Khrushchev was genuinely committed to raising the priority of agriculture in the Soviet economy, which Stalin had sacrificed for the needs of industry. To increase productivity,

These two paragraphs focus on the weaknesses of the Soviet economy in terms of the over-emphasis on heavy industry and the low priority given to agriculture.

The answer explains whether or not Khrushchev addressed these weaknesses. This is a sustained and relevant approach.

Khrushchev tried to stimulate initiative in the system by such measures as the abolition of the MTS and giving greater powers to individual collectives to make decisions at local level. Yet most of Khrushchev's reforms were based on naive assumptions. Without the MTS, collectives struggled to obtain sufficient machinery. The policy of increasing the size of collectives was deeply unpopular with the peasants, who felt more divorced from the land they worked. One of the fundamental weaknesses of the Soviet system was the use of state-ownership of land, a system that discouraged peasants from increasing their production as any benefits would go to the state. Government acknowledgement of this weakness resulted in greater concessions being given to peasants on to how they could use the produce from their private plots. The Virgin Lands Scheme was an attempt to increase food production by opening up new areas to cultivation. Six million acres of land were brought under cultivation with considerable investment. Khrushchev succeeded in raising the status of agriculture in the Soviet economy. This was no mean achievement in the context of a powerful military-industrial complex that argued strongly within the Politburo for their sector to receive preferential treatment. Nonetheless, food production did not meet the needs of the population and productivity remained dismal.

Khrushchev had recognised the fundamental weaknesses of the Soviet economy; Brezhnev was more aware of how radical changes to the economic system threatened the power of the Party and its elites. In 1965, Brezhnev abolished the Regional Economic Councils set up by Khrushchev and placed more power back into the centre of the planning apparatus. Gosplan was given greater powers of co-ordination. Influence lay with conservatives in the Party. Nonetheless Kosygin, the Prime Minister, launched a series of reforms in 1965 that aimed to unleash creativity within the decision-making process and improve productivity. Opposition meant that these reforms were little more than tinkering with the system. Attempts to adopt new technology were limited by the rigid nature of the command economy. Managers feared losing production while new machinery was installed in factories. The result was that the new equipment was often left to rust as the factory continued to achieve its output target with old machinery. Brezhnev did, however, continue the push towards greater consumer goods, especially under the Ninth Five-Year Plan. A sign of the changed emphasis was that the rate of growth in the production of consumer goods was higher than that of heavy industry.

This section continues the explanation by looking at Brezhnev's measures.

An alternative approach would be to consider each weakness across the period rather than divide the answer according to Khrushchev's and Brezhnev's reforms.

Although Brezhnev reversed Khrushchev's decentralising schemes for agriculture, he did accept that agriculture needed heavy investment and this feature of previous policy continued. By 1976, 26 percent of all investment was in agriculture. Brezhnev was also prepared to allow a bigger role for production on peasants' private plots, but the dead hand of the state remained. None of these measures addressed the poor productivity of the agricultural sector. A key sign of failure was the continued import of US wheat.

This section continues the explanation and has a clear focus on whether reforms were successful.

The economic reforms of Khrushchev and Brezhnev revealed a recognition that there were fundamental weaknesses in a centralised command economy, but attempts to address these weaknesses were little more than experimenting around the edges. A lack of incentives and initiative were intrinsic to a command economy and, as Lenin had recognised with the NEP in 1921, the best way of addressing this issue was to use elements of capitalism. The focus on heavy industry that had been a key feature of Stalin's Five-Year Plans could not be altered without attacking Party officials who had become entrenched in the system. In this sense, the system could not be reformed.

The concluding paragraph makes a relevant and reasoned judgement. It addresses the key words 'interests' and 'success' and explores them in some depth and with some sophistication.

Verdict

This is a strong answer because:

- it considers the precise focus of the question by explaining how economic reforms were related to addressing economic weaknesses
- it gives a reasoned judgement on whether fundamental weaknesses were addressed
- it uses precise detail to support points
- it explores the meaning of 'fundamental'
- the quality of written communication, logical coherence and conceptual understanding are all excellent.

Paper 1: A Level sample answer with comments

Section C

These questions require you to read two extracts carefully to identify the key points raised and establish the argument being put forward. For these questions remember to:

- read and analyse the extracts thoroughly remembering that you need to use them in tandem
- take careful note of the information provided about the extracts
- deploy own knowledge to develop the points and arguments that emerge from the extracts and to provide appropriate context
- develop an argument rooted in the points raised in the extracts and come to a substantiated conclusion.

Study Extracts 7 and 8 on page 130 before you answer this question.

In the light of differing interpretations, how convincing do you find the view that the Soviet Union collapsed because of 'national unrest'? (Extract 8, line 2)

To explain your answer, analyse and evaluate the material in both extracts using your knowledge of the issues. (20 marks)

Average student answer

In December 1991 the Soviet Union ceased to exist. The country was formally disbanded to be replaced by 15 independent republics. There were many reasons for this event. Gorbachev, the last Communist leader, had failed to improve the economy and proved unable to reform the Communist Party to meet the challenges it was facing in the 1980s. Nationalist groups gained support as many demanded independence from the Soviet Union. In the end, Boris Yeltsin undermined Gorbachev and the Soviet Union by organising himself around growing support for radical political and economic reform.

The fact that the collapse of the Soviet Union occurred suddenly and unexpectedly suggests that a significant role was played by short-term factors. Central to these factors were the failures of Gorbachev's economic reforms, which resulted in inflation and severe shortages. Due to glasnost, the Soviet population were able to express their growing discontent with the Party. This discontent grew further as it became clear that Gorbachev lacked the power to change the Communist Party. Party officials resisted change, seeing it as an attack on their power and privileges. His tactics of trying to steer a middle ground between conservatives and liberals within the Party left him isolated. The only solution in the end was to remove the Communist Party's monopoly on power. This created a situation where central power, as exercised by the Communist Party, was weakened. Into this situation of a developing power vacuum, nationalist groups within the Soviet Union gained increased support. The growth of nationalist sentiment within the USSR may have varied in strength between the national groups of the Soviet Union but it was a key factor in removing Soviet power over the Baltic republics. The Baltic republics had never considered themselves to be fully integrated into the Soviet Union. They had a history of independence during the World Wars that was not shared with the rest of the Soviet republics. The strength of this resurgence of nationalism in the Baltic republics led to the establishment of Popular Fronts in all three republics between April and October 1988. The lead was taken by members of the intelligentsia, who formed Sajudis (movements), but they quickly became mass organisations. They called for protection for their native languages and cultural traditions, but quickly demanded independence from the Soviet Union. In Lithuania, the fact that over 75 percent of its population were ethnic Lithuanians helped to give the movement strength and unity. In 1990, the Popular Fronts won a majority in elections to the Supreme Soviets in all three Baltic republics. Lithuania took the lead in declaring independence from the Soviet Union. The

This is a weak opening paragraph because it does not address the interpretation given in the question. There is no awareness of the fact that the question requires a consideration of an interpretation that needs to be assessed for its validity.

It would be better to start with a sentence like 'The role of national unrest in bringing about the collapse of the Soviet Union has been a cause of much debate'.

This paragraph is also weak because it makes no reference to the extracts or the fact that it is dealing with an interpretation. Section C questions are not asking you to present an explanation as you would in Sections A and B. The focus here should be on assessing an interpretation.

other two republics followed soon after. The impact of these developments was to snowball through the remaining Soviet republics and the pressure for independence, although it varied between republics, was enough to destroy Gorbachev's Union Treaty, which was a last chance to preserve the Soviet Union.

Extract 7 describes the problems caused by the rise of nationalism. It does make the point that these problems were 'exacerbated by the more tolerant atmosphere within the media', a reference to the new freedom of expression allowed by Gorbachev under the policy of glasnost. Extract 7 also draws attention to the fact that the developments in the Baltic republics 'filtered down to the other republics'. The Georgians became particularly vocal in demanding independence. Linked to this development was the collapse of communist regimes in Eastern Europe. The fact that the Soviet government would not stand in the way of each country developing in its own way encouraged republics within the USSR to push forward their own demands without fear. Thus, Extract 7 highlights the importance of national unrest as a factor that undermined the Soviet government.

Extract 8 gives a slightly different approach to the role of national unrest. Smith states that national unrest acted like an 'explosion'. The use of the word 'explosion' indicates that the development had a huge impact. According to Extract 8, this was surprising because the policies of the Soviet government towards the nationalities had generally been successful up to this point. Extract 8 mentions the unrest in the Baltic republics, just like Extract 7, but also mentions the ethnic conflict in the Caucasus region. Extract 8 concludes by stating that 'national unrest in turn fed into political and economic turmoil' and it was this that provided the 'deathblows' to the Soviet Union.

It is clear that historians see the rise of nationalism within the Soviet Union during the late 1980s as an important factor in the collapse of the Soviet Union. The main debate is over whether this development, on its own, brought about the fall of the Soviet Union. Marples, in Extract 7, suggests that it was very important, whereas Smith, in Extract 8, thinks that it was linked to 'political and economic turmoil' and that the combination of all of these pressures was too much for the Soviet government to deal with. The result was the fall of the USSR. The importance of the role of nationalism is shown by the fact that the USSR was replaced by 15 independent republics.

These sections use the extracts with some precision and draw points out from the evidence, but explanation is limited. There are lots of opportunities here to use own knowledge to explain points and assess their validity.

It would also be useful to make cross-references between the extracts to highlight areas of agreement and disagreement.

The concluding paragraph is better. It makes a judgement that is relevant and shows some awareness of the differences in the extracts. It would have been better if this approach had been taken earlier in the answer.

Verdict

This is an average answer because:

- it lacks a direct focus on the key words in the question, 'how convincing do you find the view…'
- it does not integrate own knowledge with the extracts
- it does not cross-reference the extracts to highlight areas of agreement and disagreement
- it comes to a relevant judgement, but it is not argued explicitly through the answer.

Use the feedback on this answer to rewrite it, making as many improvements as you can.

Paper 1: A Level sample answer with comments

Section C

These questions require you to read two extracts carefully to identify the key points raised and establish the argument being put forward. For these questions remember to:

- read and analyse the extracts thoroughly remembering that you need to use them in tandem
- take careful note of the information provided about the extracts
- deploy own knowledge to develop the points and arguments that emerge from the extracts and to provide appropriate context
- develop an argument rooted in the points raised in the extracts and come to a substantiated conclusion.

Study Extracts 7 and 8 on page 130 before you answer this question.

In the light of differing interpretations, how convincing do you find the view that the Soviet Union collapsed because of 'national unrest'? (Extract 8, line 2)

To explain your answer, analyse and evaluate the material in both extracts using your knowledge of the issues. (20 marks)

Strong student answer

Nationalism was one of the most dominant political forces of the 20th century, playing a prime role in world wars and civil wars across Europe and the world. The multinational empires of the Ottomans and Hapsburgs were consigned to history long before the collapse of the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union was, perhaps, an anomaly by 1991. The rise of nationalism, as a force within the USSR, has been a cause of much debate. It has been identified as both a cause and a result of Soviet decline and collapse. These interpretations are highlighted by Extracts 7 and 8: Marples focuses on the rise of nationalism as a key force in weakening the Soviet Union, whereas Smith highlights its development within the context of 'political and economic turmoil' to create a 'declining spiral from which the USSR received its eventual deathblows'. The truth behind these differing interpretations is difficult to disentangle, but it is clear the role of national unrest was an essential part of the collapse of the Soviet Union.

This is a strong introduction because it provides a clear awareness of the issue under discussion and the fact that there are differing interpretations on the issue that need to be assessed.

Both extracts acknowledge that nationalism was important in the context of Soviet collapse: Extract 7 refers to problems caused by the growth of nationalist sentiment and Extract 8 mentions the 'explosion' of national unrest. The use of the word 'explosion' suggests that Smith thinks the rise of nationalism had far-reaching effects and put a serious strain on the Soviet government. Both extracts are right to draw attention to the problems posed by the rise of nationalism. Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania had a different history to the rest of the Soviet republics. They had been independent states before their incorporation into the USSR in 1939 and there were people in the republics with a memory of this. Many still viewed the Soviet Union as an occupying force. These factors promoted a resurgence of feelings of nationalist identity. The growth of Popular Fronts in 1988 caused a particular problem for the Soviet government because they quickly became mass organisations. Members of the intelligentsia helped form Sajudis (movements), which called for protection for their native languages and cultural traditions, but quickly demanded independence from the Soviet Union. Extract 7 draws attention to the wider context in which this development occurred. It mentions a 'general feeling of dissatisfaction', a reference to the economic failures of Gorbachev's policy of economic restructuring, or perestroika. Marples rightly draws attention to the impact of the 'downfall of communist regimes in Eastern Europe', which, according to Marples, gave a 'significant boost' to the developing nationalist movements within the USSR. The courageous actions of Solidarity in Poland, and the inspirational images of the Berlin Wall being dismantled by people power in 1989 must have provided encouragement to those within the USSR who wished to break away from the yoke of Soviet oppression. As Extract 7 states, this

This paragraph focuses on the differing interpretations offered by the extracts and uses own knowledge to develop and explain the key features of each interpretation. Own knowledge is also used effectively to test the validity of each interpretation.

allowed the nationalist movements in the republics to 'act with more confidence'. As a result of this confidence, the Popular Fronts won a majority in the elections of 1990 to the Supreme Soviets in all three Baltic republics and Lithuania took the lead in declaring independence in March.

Marples's interpretation cannot be completely accepted without challenging some of his assumptions. Smith makes the point that the Soviet Union had been highly successful 'in integrating diverse peoples under a single state' and this point has validity. It was certainly true that, other than the Baltic republics, the only other republic where there was a significant nationalist movement was in Georgia. Elsewhere, there was little demand for breaking away from the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union had shown 'signs of flexibility' in meeting the needs of non-Russian groups. It had allowed a degree of autonomous control accommodating the wishes of its national peoples through supporting their languages in schools. The republics had also been net-gainers of Soviet economic investment, especially for the Central Asian republics. This was an advantage for them retaining the Union. The distribution of ethnic Russians throughout the Soviet Union provided a useful tool in weakening the forces calling for separation. Evidence that supports the strength of ties to the Soviet Union, even during its final days, lies in the referendum held in March 1991. It indicated popular support for maintaining the Soviet Union in all of the republics outside Georgia and the Baltic republics. Gorbachev's new Union Treaty of 1991 contained enough concessions for preserving language and customs in each republic to keep support for a continued union alive. There was plenty of evidence to indicate that the Soviet Union could survive without the Baltic republics and Georgia, and that the collapse of the Communist Party did not necessarily mean the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The situation in the Caucasus region was, as Smith points out, complicated by 'links to economic and political upheaval'. Ethnic clashes in Nagorno-Karabakh during 1988 led to violence, but it was the declining capacity of the central government in Moscow to take effective action that worsened the situation. The affair clearly demonstrated the declining power of the central Soviet government over the outlying republics and this was reinforced by the spread of other ethnic clashes, in Georgia in 1989 and Kirgizstan in 1990. These clashes had the effect of destabilising central control, but did not necessarily pose a threat to the Soviet Union as a whole.

As Smith highlights, national unrest only took on an important role when the Soviet government had been weakened by other factors. This 'declining spiral' was the result of many factors acting together: the economic collapse and the discrediting of the Communist Party that had occurred during glasnost. A corrupt, inefficient and negligent Party could no longer command the respect of the people on whose behalf it was supposedly ruling. As the power of the Party declined, local Party officials saw nationalist movements as a good way of protecting their privileges and interests. Thus, nationalism only became a real factor in bringing about the collapse of the Soviet Union when it suited the interests of the local elites, not because of genuine nationalist fervour. In this respect, Smith's view that national unrest 'fed into' political turmoil is correct. But it understates the role of the wider context. This interpretation also holds true of the rise of Russian nationalism, which only became a serious political force at the very end of 1990, when Boris Yeltsin was able to use it to promote his own political position and many Russians lost faith in the ability of the Soviet system to defend their interests. The refusal of several republics to sign the Union Treaty in 1991 marked the nail in the coffin for the USSR, but by this stage the Soviet system had already failed.

These sections deploy precise own knowledge to explain the interpretations in the extracts. Here own knowledge is effectively integrated with reference to the extracts.

The concluding paragraph makes a relevant and reasoned judgement. It makes a reasoned judgement on the interpretations that assesses their validity. There is a clear focus on the role of national unrest.

Verdict

This is a strong answer because:

- it has a sharp focus on the question
- it explains the key features of the interpretations in the extracts by integrating own knowledge
- the validity of the interpretations is assessed by reference to own knowledge
- a reasoned judgement is made that assesses the validity of the interpretations on the role of national unrest in the fall of the Soviet Union
- the quality of written communication, logical coherence and conceptual understanding are all excellent.

Mao's China, 1949–76

INTRODUCTION

The changes that China experienced between 1949 and 1976 have had a remarkable impact, not just on China itself, but on the rest of the world as well. Under Mao Zedong (written as Mao Tse-tung until the late 20th century) and the Communists, China was transformed from a weak, divided and undeveloped country into a rapidly industrialising world power with nuclear weapons. By 2014, its economy was the fastest growing in the world and ranked the second largest, behind only the USA, in terms of productivity. The foundations for this phenomenal growth were laid during the period covered by this topic, when Mao forced China into an industrial revolution, but with complete disregard for the consequences on individuals. People died in their millions as a result of starvation, overwork or persecution.

Once Mao had secured his political power by terrorising potential opponents, he set about modernising the economy on the Russian model through a series of Five-Year Plans. Industries were taken into state ownership and the land, which the peasants had only acquired in 1950, was collectivised, at first on a voluntary basis and then by force. However, the successes of the first plan made Mao overconfident, to the extent that he boasted that China would overtake Britain as an economic power by 1965 and the USA soon after that. Proud of the fact that he had defied traditional Marxist expectations by leading a successful peasant revolution, and increasingly disillusioned by Moscow anyway, Mao broke off China's links with Russia.

The second plan, normally referred to as the Great Leap Forward, was a disaster, plunging China into a famine that cost in the region of 30 million lives. The plan depended on the idea of People's Communes, groups of collectivised villages pooling all their resources and freeing up labour to work on massive water conservancy schemes that would in turn make the land more productive. However, the plan had not been thought through – Mao despised technical experts, who learned to keep quiet to avoid persecution, and believed that manpower alone would allow China to achieve the targets he set out. The climate of fear that penetrated all levels of the Communist Party meant that officials covered up the truth about food shortages and other mistakes, enabling Mao to avoid facing up to reality until it was too late.

The other event of pivotal importance in the period was the Cultural Revolution, a successful manoeuvre by Mao to restore his control over the Party, which had slipped after the Great Leap Forward. Mao placed great importance on the idea of constantly renewing the revolution, and he used the young generation to purge those with traditional or capitalist outlooks who were comfortable with the new status quo. Between 1966 and 1968, millions of people fell victim to Red Guard violence before Mao allowed the army to restore control and the **Red Guards** were sent to the countryside to learn from the peasants. Mao had succeeded in purging the Party and reasserting his power, but at enormous cost to the victims and to the development of the country, which had been paralysed for two years as schools shut down and businesses struggled to function.

KEY TERM

Red Guard
Loose groupings of young people between the ages of 12 and 30, mainly teenage school and college students. They were initially formed to attack teachers who were insufficiently revolutionary.

1945 – Japan defeated in Second World War — 1945

1949 – Communist victory and People's Republic of China declared — 1949

1950 – Campaign of terror against counter-revolutionaries. Land redistributed from landlords to peasants — 1950

1956 – De-Stalinisation in Russia — 1956

1958–62 – Second Five-Year Plan (Great Leap Forward) leading to famine — 1958–62

1963 – Vietnam War escalates — 1963

1966 – Cultural Revolution begins – Red Guards formed — 1966

1971 – Fall of Lin Biao (Mao's designated successor) — 1971

1973 – Rehabilitation of Deng Xiaoping. Succession struggle — 1973

1978 – Pragmatic economic reforms begin under Deng, but no loosening of political control — 1978

1989 – Crushing of democracy movement in Tiananmen Square massacre. Fall of Communism in Eastern Europe — 1989

1946–49 – 1946–49 – Civil war between nationalists and communists

1950–53 – 1950–53 – Korean War

1953–57 – 1953–57 – First Five-Year Plan – industry nationalised, agriculture collectivised

1956–57 – 1956–57 – Hundred Flowers movement leading to anti-rightist campaign

1961 – 1961 – Split with Soviet Union becomes definite

1964 – 1964 – Successful nuclear tests

1968 – 1968 – Red Guards disbanded and sent into countryside

1972 – 1972 – Nixon's visit starts better relations with the West

1976 – 1976 – Death of Mao

1981 – 1981 – Official admission of Mao's errors, but emphasis on his achievements

Despite these two events, both of which had disastrous consequences for millions, Mao is widely liked by Chinese people today because the survivors of these years, and their children, have reaped the economic benefits of modernisation since then. China industrialised sooner than it would otherwise have done; the country has been kept more politically stable and unified than previously; and millions have been lifted out of poverty as a result.

Perhaps the last words should be left with the veteran Party leader, Chen Yun (see Source 1).

SOURCE 1

This is how leading Party member Chen Yun summed up his view of Mao's legacy shortly after the Chairman's death in 1976. He is alluding to the way in which Mao's reputation was damaged, first by the Great Leap Forward (1958–62) and then by the Cultural Revolution (after 1966).

> Had Mao died in 1956, there would be no doubt that he was a great leader. Had he died in 1966, his achievements would have been somewhat tarnished, but his overall record still very good. Since he actually died in 1976, there is nothing we can do.

SOURCE 2

The huge sculpture of Mao as a young man which towers over the river at Changsha, the town where Mao went to school in his late teens. Completed in 2009, it stands over 100 feet tall, Unlike most representations of Mao, it depicts him in his youth.



2a.1 Establishing Communist rule, 1949–57

KEY QUESTIONS

- How serious were the problems facing the People's Republic of China when it was set up in 1949?
- How successful were the Communists in creating a political system that would give them control of power within the PRC?
- How effectively did the Communist Party deal with opposition?
- To what extent did involvement in the Korean War affect the development of the PRC?

INTRODUCTION

The People's Republic of China (PRC) was officially established when Mao Zedong addressed a rally of some 300,000 supporters in Tiananmen Square, Beijing on 1 October 1949. The establishment of the new republic brought to an end three years of civil war and 20 years of turmoil. The Chinese people breathed a collective sigh of relief that the years of conflict were over.

Key developments, 1911–49

China had undergone dramatic changes in the period before the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) seized power in 1949. The Qing dynasty of emperors, which had been overthrown in 1911, had been in power since 1644 – nearly as long as the Romanovs in Tsarist Russia. The republic that replaced them in 1911 disintegrated almost immediately as China plunged into a period of chaos, with rival warlords fighting to establish control of its regions, ignoring the central government's efforts to impose law and order. It took ten years of unrest before Chiang Kai-shek and the Nationalist Party (Guomindang (GMD)) actually defeated the warlords and brought China under greater central control. Although, for a few years, the GMD had collaborated with the newly formed Communist Party, this unity did not last because their aims were so different.

In the period 1927–37, known as the Nanking decade, Chiang established relative political stability and tried to destroy the Communists, driving them into the interior of China, where they eventually regrouped to set up the Jiangxi soviet in 1928. Determined to finish them off, he launched a series of encirclement campaigns aimed at denying resources to Jiangxi. In 1934, in a desperate bid to escape before these sieges were successful, some 100,000 Communists embarked on a retreat, later to become glorified in Communist mythology as the Long March. Only 20,000 survived, making it to the relative safety of Yanan, where they established a new soviet that was to remain their base. It was here that Mao asserted his leadership over the Party, and here the Communists gained vital experience of government, which prepared them to some extent to govern the country after 1949.



Meanwhile, the GMD had been powerless to prevent the Japanese from invading and occupying the rich north-eastern province of Manchuria in 1931. By 1937, the Japanese were ready to extend their control further and so the Sino-Japanese War began in earnest. Faced with a common enemy that threatened the existence of China itself, the GMD and CCP made a new **United Front** against the invaders, but until 1941, they were unable to prevent the Japanese steadily pushing south and occupying the eastern coastal zone.

However, the failure of the Japanese to destroy the US Navy in the attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941 proved to be a turning point, because the Americans began helping the Chinese to fight back against the Japanese. Chiang, who the Americans took more seriously than Mao as a potential national leader, was hoping that a large US Army force would land on Chinese soil as a prelude to attacking Japan, an army that he hoped would also be used to destroy the Communists. However, the Japanese surrender came sooner than he expected when the Americans dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Although China was free once again, Chiang still faced the problem of the Communists, who had grown in popularity during the war years, largely because they had successfully cultivated the support of the peasantry.

KEY TERM

United Front
An arrangement between two groups holding significantly different outlooks, who put their differences to one side in order to address a more serious threat to their survival. The first United Front had been created to defeat the warlords and lasted from 1924 to 1927.

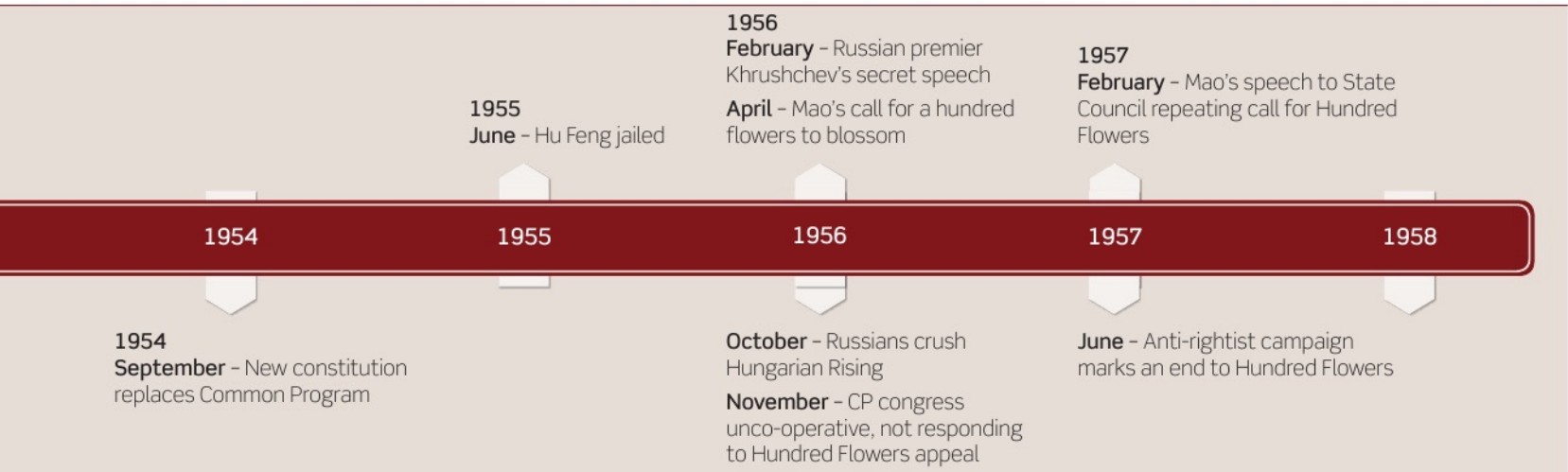
Despite attempts by the USA to get the two sides to compromise and form a coalition government, open civil war between the GMD and CCP broke out in 1946. Although Chiang had overwhelming superiority in resources, he squandered his initial advantages by rushing into a full-scale attack on the Communist strongholds in Manchuria. Having survived the onslaught there, the Communists were gradually able to move south and take over the Nationalist-held areas.

In December 1949, Chiang left the mainland and flew to join the remnants of his forces on the island of Taiwan. Although he still claimed to be the legitimate ruler of the entire country, Mao and the Communists were left in de facto control.

SOURCE 1

Shanghai, December 1948. Nationalists executing captured Communists in broad daylight during the last days of the civil war. Soon after this, the remnants of the Nationalist forces withdrew to Taiwan.





HOW SERIOUS WERE THE PROBLEMS FACING THE PRC WHEN IT WAS SET UP IN 1949?

The aftermath of the civil war of 1946–49

Clearly, the problems created by so many years of unrest made China difficult to govern, but in some senses, the situation in 1949 was favourable to the Communists.

- Simply bringing to an end the years of conflict generated goodwill towards the Communists.
- As the Communists had extended the areas under their control during the war, they had proved that they were capable of more effective organisation than the Nationalists, who had squandered their opportunities for so long. Both these factors gave the Communists cause for optimism in October 1949.
- Although it may have involved an element of wishful thinking on their part, many non-Communists imagined that life under Mao would at least be tolerable, and they would have a role to play in helping to rebuild China. This was because Mao had made it clear that creating a Communist society would be a long-term project: in the short-term, he declared his willingness to work with all social groups who had China's interests at heart. It seemed entirely possible, therefore, that a new United Front might be constructed, representing middle-class interests as well as those of the workers and peasants. To many, this was a more attractive (and realistic) option than fleeing to join the Nationalists in Taiwan.

As far as Mao was concerned, the civil war had greatly strengthened his position at the top of the Party. His reputation as a military commander had been elevated by the way he supervised the successful transition from guerrilla to open warfare, and it was his strength of will that had allowed him to overcome the doubts of his military commanders. Once the war was over, Mao was unquestionably regarded as the architect of the new China, and his authority could not easily be challenged. Above all, he had the devoted loyalty of the Chinese army (the People's Liberation Army (PLA)) behind him.

Mao intended to use this power to restore stability to China, and the only way to do this was to make all political opposition impossible. This was what he had done earlier in Yanan, where he had imposed his personal authority and suppressed all opposition. It was a lesson he had learned from observing the difficulties faced by Chiang Kai-shek, whose ability to control China was made more difficult by the continued presence of different political factions inside his own party, the GMD. It was Mao's intention, therefore, to return to a political system where all power lay at the top, in his and the CCP's hands, reinforced by military power as and when necessary.

Another lesson that the civil war had reinforced for Mao was the value of broadening his support base. Initially, the Communists had concentrated very much on cultivating peasant support, which they did by ensuring their Red Army treated the peasants more fairly than the GMD forces, and by organising land redistribution from landowners to poor peasants in the areas under their control. These were successful strategies that attracted large amounts of peasant support to the Communists.

However, as the Reds began to extend the areas they controlled during the civil war, more cities fell under their authority. Initially, Harbin in northern Manchuria was the only city they controlled, and it was here that they gained their first experience of administering a large urban area. As their fortunes picked up during the war, they applied the lessons of Harbin elsewhere, and so broadened their support base to include a wider range of social groups. They thus showed they were capable of handling urban, as well as rural, issues.

In general terms, therefore, the situation in the immediate aftermath of the civil war was relatively promising for the Communists.

The state of China's industry, agriculture and national infrastructure

The immediate impact of war

The Chinese economy had been crippled by 12 years of war. By 1936, China was recovering well from the Great Depression, but the focus on war from 1937 onwards set the economy right back.

China's industrial output dropped because the Japanese seized the most productive areas as they advanced southwards. In addition, Japanese bombing raids caused serious damage to Chinese industries, and productive capacity fell further due to the **scorched-earth** tactics of the retreating Nationalist forces. By the time the Japanese were defeated in 1945, China's industrial output stood at only 25 percent of its pre-war level.

The food supply situation was critical in 1949. The disruption to agriculture caused by the conscription of peasants to fight in the rival armies had been compounded by the displacement of thousands of people fleeing inland to escape the Japanese in the east. Food production in 1945 was reckoned to be 30 percent lower than it had been at the start of the war in 1937 and, during the war, Henan province had suffered a famine accounting for between two and three million lives. Wartime food requisitioning had been necessary in order to feed both the army and the cities, but this would continue to be the case after 1949, because of the size of the PLA and the continued growth of the urban population. Some 20 percent of the population lived in cities that depended on surpluses from the countryside, but the countryside could not even feed itself.

China's finances were also devastated by the war years. With sources of revenue drastically reduced, the GMD had paid for the war by borrowing and printing money, policies that had already caused **hyperinflation** by 1945, and the situation got no better in Chiang's final years. In 1949, the inflation rate stood at 1,000 percent, and matters were made worse for the Communist government when Chiang took China's foreign currency reserves with him when he fled to Taiwan. Immediate measures to tackle these financial issues would clearly have to be a top priority for the Communist Party.

Although, in 1945, the Japanese vacated the areas they had occupied, the civil war that broke out one year later prolonged the problems for a further three years. To make matters worse, the Russians had declared war on Japan shortly before the Japanese surrendered, giving the Russians the opportunity to advance into Manchuria and seize many of its industrial assets before they left.

KEY TERMS

Scorched earth
These are tactics that involve destroying resources and infrastructure in the course of retreating, in order to prevent the enemy utilising them. It was a ploy used to great effect by the Russians as they retreated before the German advance in 1941.

Hyperinflation
Inflation is a fall in the purchasing power of money, usually the consequence of prices going up faster than wages. Hyperinflation is when this happens to an extreme extent.

The longer-term situation

When the Communists came to power in 1949, China was still predominantly an agricultural country, producing mainly rice, wheat and oilseed crops. Farming methods were labour-intensive, using only basic levels of mechanisation, and overwhelmingly reliant on horse- and manpower. Tractors were unheard of. The vast majority of the population lived in rural areas where food supplies were adequate, provided there were no natural disasters.

EXTEND YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Natural disasters
China suffers from frequent natural disasters. The 1931 Yangtze River floods, which followed two years of drought, were regarded as the worst anywhere in the 20th century and cost over three million lives. Vast areas of agricultural land were ruined. Traditionalists viewed such events as a sign that the ruler had lost the 'mandate of heaven' – which meant the people no longer had to obey his authority. In 1976, a few weeks before Mao's death, the Tangshan earthquake killed nearly half a million people, a sign to many of Mao's imminent demise.

Agriculture had been developing slowly under the Nationalists, but farmers had been hit by the steep drop in food prices during the Great Depression because the government normally exported food to earn foreign currency, and world trade slumped for several years after 1931. Despite covering a huge territorial area, only 15 percent of the land in China was cultivatable, so the scope for increasing agricultural output was limited unless techniques were modernised and the peasants became more productive. This was becoming increasingly necessary by 1949 because not only were more people moving to the cities and therefore increasing the demand for food, but also the total population was

growing annually: it stood at 541 million in 1949, rising to 563 million in 1951, and 587 million by 1953. Even though the war had cost China 20 million lives, overall annual population growth had continued.

Lack of industrial development in China was an even more pressing problem for the incoming government in 1949. Although China's industries were modernising, China had not yet experienced an industrial revolution in the same way as Western Europe in the 19th century, despite possessing many of the factors generally assumed to be necessary for this to happen, namely plentiful raw materials, a huge labour force and sources of power.

EXTEND YOUR KNOWLEDGE

China's failure to experience an industrial revolution

There has been much debate among historians about the reasons for this 'Great Divergence', since the publication of a book by the same name in 2000. Low labour costs in China, making it less urgent to invent labour-saving machinery, are among the many reasons cited, but there is no consensus on the main reason. Poor communications infrastructure and a lack of technical knowledge were also restricting factors.

The most advanced industrial areas lay in Manchuria, in the Yangtze delta and along the eastern seaboard, but Manchuria had been in Japanese hands since 1931. Although they had further developed its iron and steel industries, much of the new plant then fell into Soviet hands in 1945. However, the loss of Manchuria had prompted Chiang Kai-shek to set up the National Resources Committee (NRC) in 1932, in order to channel investment into industries elsewhere. By 1945, some 70 percent of industry was state-owned and the NRC had a staff of 30,000 technical experts. They supervised a workforce of 250,000, many of whom stayed on in mainland China to serve the Communists after 1949. These state-owned industries were to remain nationalised after 1949.

Despite this improvement, industrial development overall was hampered by long-term underinvestment and an under-skilled workforce. China's future ability to survive would require industrialisation to be imposed from above by the state, which would also have to find ways of making agriculture more productive in order to feed the industrial workers.

The economic infrastructure of China was seriously underdeveloped even before the war, and was reduced to ruins by bombing raids and a lack of maintenance between 1937 and 1949. If the new government was to be able to move industrialisation forward, the rail, road and telephone links would have to be restored and then modernised as a matter of urgency. As things stood in 1949, only Manchuria and the population centres of the east coast and lower Yangtze had transport and communications systems in place. Mao had already experimented with radio broadcasting in Yanan, and was quick to install a state radio station in Beijing and get it broadcasting in 1949, but the communications infrastructure would need a major overhaul in order for economic modernisation to be possible.

EXTEND YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Bombing raids

The Japanese bombing of Chongqing, which became the capital city after the fall of Beijing, was one of the most intensive aerial bombardments anywhere in the Second World War. The Japanese targeted residential areas in order to maximise civilian losses, killing over 10,000 civilians between 1938 and 1943.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

Priorities

What do you think would have been the three most important issues that the incoming government would have to sort out once it was in power? Put them in order of importance and explain the top priority.



Figure 1.1 Political map of China, 1949.

HOW SUCCESSFUL WERE THE COMMUNISTS IN CREATING A POLITICAL SYSTEM THAT WOULD GIVE THEM CONTROL OF POWER WITHIN THE PRC?

It was important for the Communists to act quickly to establish a new political system. If they waited too long, they could have lost their gains and China could have slipped into anarchy. It was also vital to give the new regime an air of legitimacy, so that people accepted its authority.

Therefore, preparations for the new China began as soon as Beijing fell, at the end of January 1949, although it was not until October that the new republic could be declared officially. Collaborating over the planning with other groups who were opposed to the GMD, not only helped to split the nationalist opposition, but also gave the new regime an appearance of wider popularity. The Communists kept up this pretence of unity until they were strong enough to stand alone in the early 1950s.

Temporary bodies were set up to run the country and a provisional constitution was adopted, until, by 1954, it was possible to adopt more permanent political institutions. Even though the constitutional details were not finalised until 1954, it was immediately made clear that the Communist Party would be leading the government, and that its power would be based on a continuing partnership with the PLA.

Government control of the press, which was already considered normal before 1949, was continued through Xinhua, the government-controlled press agency. This ensured that all of the mass circulation daily newspapers reported favourably on government policies and party initiatives, and therefore the new system received positive publicity from the outset.

KEY TERMS

Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC)
A conference to which the Communists invited delegates of 14 other parties in a continuation of the old United Front approach. It acted as the provisional Parliament until 1954 and was responsible for passing essential legislation to set up the new China.

Central People's Government
Composed of the ministers and departmental heads, this acted as the government of the new China. From 1954, it became known as the State Council.

Common Program
This was the new constitution, which was updated in 1954.

The organisation of the government

In September 1949, with victory in the civil war imminent, the Communist Party arranged a meeting of the **Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC)**, which took the first steps in preparing a new political system to replace that of Chiang and the Nationalists once they surrendered.

It was composed mainly of Communist sympathisers, but its 600 delegates included a range of other minority groups, such as the China Democratic League, giving it a broader appearance and therefore a greater claim to legitimacy. The CPPCC appointed the new **Central People's Government** as the supreme state body and approved the **Common Program**, a temporary constitution to steer China through the next five years. It also decided the various state symbols that would be used, such as the flag, national anthem, calendar and choice of capital city.

The Common Program declared that China had been transformed into a new society based on an alliance between the workers and peasants, whose interests would be represented by the Communist Party. It guaranteed a wide range of personal freedoms, as well as gender equality, making China theoretically one of the freest countries in the world. The reality, in practice, was of course very different, as the Common Program also gave the army and the police the right to suppress all counter-revolutionary activity, powers they used to great effect in the years that followed.

As China was not yet thought ready for full socialism, it was conceded that there would have to be a transitional period of co-operation between the working class and the existing capitalist elements of society. However, the long-term future of these capitalist elements was clearly insecure, as Source 2 illustrates. In his speech 'On the People's Democratic Dictatorship', Mao had identified the four classes of people who should be allowed to have rights in the new China. Everyone else (he called them 'the five black categories') was to be repressed.

SOURCE 2

From 'On the People's Democratic Dictatorship', *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*. These are excerpts from a much longer speech to the public by Mao on 30 June 1949, in which he looked back on the lessons that the Communist Party had learned over the previous 28 years (it was founded in 1921), and looked ahead to the way they hoped to organise the political system in China once final victory over the GMD had been achieved.

All the experience the Chinese people have accumulated through several decades teaches us to enforce the people's democratic dictatorship, that is, to deprive the reactionaries[*] of the right to speak and let the people alone have that right...

Who are the people? At the present stage in China, they are the working class, the peasantry, the urban petty bourgeoisie, and the national bourgeoisie. These classes, led by the working class and the Communist Party, unite to form their own state and elect their own government; they enforce their dictatorship over the running dogs[**] of imperialism – they suppress them and allow them only to behave themselves. If they speak or act in an unruly way, they will be promptly stopped and punished. Democracy is practised within the ranks of the people, who enjoy the rights of freedom of speech, assembly, association and so on. The right to vote belongs only to the people, not to the reactionaries. The combination of these two aspects, democracy for the people and dictatorship over the reactionaries, is the people's democratic dictatorship.

[*Reactionaries prefer to keep things as they are, and are therefore considered as standing in the way of progress. It was a label frequently used to discredit political opponents who were not being co-operative.

**Running dog was a demeaning term frequently used by the Communists to put down the USA and its friends.]

Mao referred to this approach as 'New Democracy', but it was a very different type of democracy from that practised in the UK, and the way it worked is often referred to as democratic centralism (explained below).

When it came to passing legislation, the central government simply rubber-stamped proposals put in front of it by the **Politburo**. The CPPCC began to draft the future constitution and, until this was published, it acted as the **legislature**. All existing laws that had been passed by the GMD were abolished, as was the old judicial system.

AS Level Exam-Style Question Section A

Study Source 2 before you answer this question.

Why is Source 2 valuable to the historian for an enquiry into the nature of the political system established in Communist China in 1949?

Explain your answer using the source, the information given about it and your own knowledge of the historical context. (8 marks)

Tip

Make sure you utilise the information about the speech – including the intended audience and the timing.

China was divided into six regions (bureaux) so that decisions taken at a national level could be imposed throughout the country, and the creation of regional congresses at least gave each region the impression that Beijing (the new capital) was listening to them. However, by putting four senior Communist officials in place over each region (a military commander, an army **political commissar**, a government chairman and, most powerful of all, a Party secretary), the CCP was clearly taking no chances. In some regions, this power was highly concentrated. For example, in the north-eastern Bureau of Manchuria, one man – Gao Gang – held all four posts, while elsewhere, three Party leaders (Deng Xiaoping, Lin Biao and Peng Dehuai) all held multiple posts. Such a level of central control was intended to prevent China from reverting to the warlord years of the 1920s, when powerful regional leaders had fought each other while the central government stood by, powerless.

EXTEND YOUR KNOWLEDGE

At this stage (1949–54), Deng Xiaoping was vice-premier to Zhou Enlai and minister of finance: Lin Biao was one of the leading marshals in the PLA, soon to be elevated to the Politburo; and Peng Dehuai was China's senior military leader, who became defence minister in 1954.

The 1954 constitution and increasing bureaucracy

In 1954, the new constitution was duly published, at which point China was officially confirmed as a Communist country. It was very much based on the 1936 Soviet Russian Constitution. The National People's Congress was created as the new legislature, and the State Council took over the functions of the Central People's Government. Although again couched in democratic terms, with various references to elections, the Communist Party retained control of the entire electoral process. Real power remained in the highest Party bodies, where decisions were taken before being endorsed by the state bodies.

The administrative composition of China also changed at this point. The six regions were now subdivided into 21 provinces, five autonomous border regions and two urban centres (Beijing and Shanghai).

This constitution was modified in 1975, but remains essentially based on that of 1954.

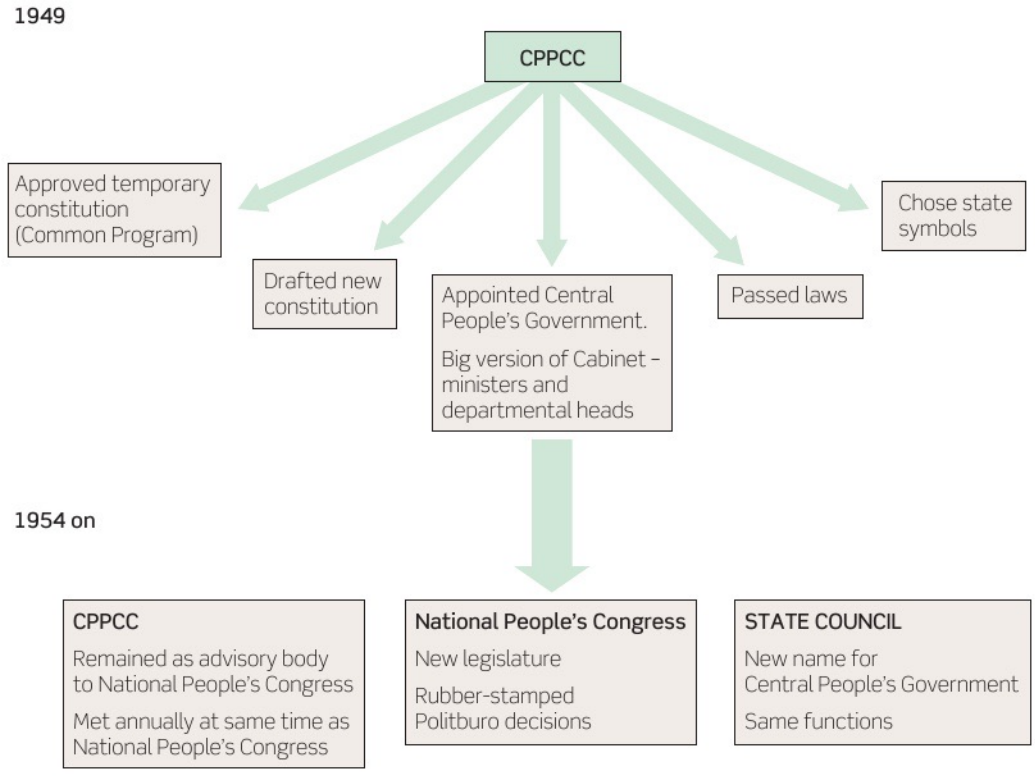


Figure 1.2 Changes in state organs at national level, 1949–54.

KEY TERMS

Politburo
The key decision-making body of the CCP, just as in the Soviet Russian Communist Party (CP). There were 14 members when it met for a plenary session, but in between these meetings, decisions were taken by the five-man standing committee of Mao Zedong, Liu Shaoqi, Zhou Enlai, Chen Yun and Zhu De. Such decisions became laws when the legislature (known as the National People's Congress from 1954) approved them, which it always did.

Legislature
The government body responsible for passing laws (legislation).

Political commissar
Responsible for monitoring people's loyalty to the Party at a local level and enforcing control as necessary.

LEVEL	STATE	PARTY	ARMY (PLA)
NATIONAL	National People's Congress and CPPCC	Standing Committee	
		Politburo	National Defence Council
	State Council	Central Committee	
		Military Affairs Committee	General staff
	Ministries and other agencies		
PROVINCIAL	People's congresses and government	Party secretary Party committee	Military commander Political commissar
LOCAL	People's congresses and councils at county, municipal and village level	Local party committees Branches in workplaces, schools, shops	Military commanders Political commissars CP branches in PLA units

Figure 1.3 Interrelationship between state, party and army.

As the Communist system became more established, the number of bureaucrats needed to staff it grew enormously: from 720,000 state officials employed in 1949 to an astonishing figure of nearly eight million ten years later. Having such a huge number of people working for it may have increased the power of central government in theory, but it also worried Mao, who was well aware that such a growth of administrators could slow down the pace of revolution. Bureaucrats behind their desks become more interested in preserving the status quo in order to safeguard their careers than in advancing the cause of revolution; and, the more paperwork there is, the longer it takes to change anything. This **bureaucratisation of the revolution** is what Mao felt had gone wrong in Soviet Russia.

KEY TERM

Bureaucratisation of the revolution
This was a frequent fear of Communist leaders. Mao was particularly concerned to prevent it, as had been Trotsky in Russia. It was felt that the dynamic nature of change would be slowed down if too much influence passed to the civil servants who ran the government behind the scenes and were anxious to ensure that correct legal procedures were being followed.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

The constitution

1 Why was the publication of the new constitution a cause of celebration within the Party?

2 Why do you think the government publicised it in this way?

The role of the Communist Party

There was never any doubt that the PRC was to be run by the Communist Party, however much the language of the 1949 and 1954 constitutions might have tried to disguise this. Leading CCP officials always held the key posts in both the state and the army. For example, Zhou Enlai was premier of the State Council from 1949 until his death in 1976, while for many years, Peng Dehuai was minister of defence and commander-in-chief of the PLA. Both of these men were at the core of the Party hierarchy. The collective leadership of the Party was theoretically responsible for deciding policy in the Politburo, but, as Mao became more powerful, it became harder to oppose him.

SOURCE 3 This government-produced poster of 1954 was called 'We are jubilant over the announcement of the new Constitution'.



ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

Key figures in the Politburo

Look up biographical details of the original five members of the Politburo standing committee. Copy and complete the table – but keep it to the key points only.

	Mao Zedong	Liu Shaoqi	Zhou Enlai	Chen Yun	Zhu De
Main role before 1949					
Main role after 1949					
Details of fall from power					

Significantly, when Mao stood down as head of state in 1958, he retained his position as Chairman of the Party, because that was where real power lay. Political leaders knew they had made it to the top when they were invited to join the Politburo. The Party headquarters in Beijing was located in Zhongnanhai, the former municipal government buildings in Tiananmen Square. It is China's version of the Russian Kremlin.

As in Russia, party membership was restricted to those who could prove their commitment and ideological correctness. Out of a population of about 500 million, there were 4.5 million Party members in October 1949, a figure that rose to 5.8 million by the end of 1950. Trained Party members, known as **cadres**, played key roles in monitoring the running of the civil service, legal system, schools and army at a local level, to ensure that Mao's line was being adhered to.

Unlike in Russia, mass participation in Party groups was encouraged, particularly in the Youth League (nine million members by 1953) and Women's Federation (76 million members), so that ordinary people played a positive role and identified with the Party's causes. The active participation of the peasants in the land reform campaign of the early 1950s, and of the students in the later Cultural Revolution, shows that this could be very effective.

Every employed citizen belonged to a work unit (*danwei*) that was led by a Party cadre. The *danwei* issued permits to travel, marry and change jobs.

KEY TERM

Cadres
In Russia, the word 'cadre' is applied to an organised group of revolutionaries, but in China, it applies to individual people. Part of their work involved reporting on the loyalty of their fellow Party colleagues and of the general public.

The role of the People's Liberation Army

SOURCE 4 'Problems of War and Strategy' (6 November 1938), from *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*. Mao said in 1938 that:

> Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun. Our principle is that the Party commands the gun, and the gun must never be allowed to control the Party.

Having defeated the Japanese and the GMD to enable the Communist Party to come to power, the PLA enjoyed a special place in Communist mythology, epitomising revolutionary values of discipline, self-sacrifice and perseverance against the odds. It was the world's largest army, made up of five million men in 1950, and consuming (along with the new navy and air force) over 40 percent of the state budget. Because of this cost, and the fact that it tied up so much manpower that could be better deployed elsewhere in the peace-time economy, it was reduced to 3.5 million by 1953 and 2.5 million by 1957, under the supervision of the minister of defence Peng Dehuai. By reducing the

army's size in this way, Mao was also ensuring that it was the Party that was holding the gun referred to in Source 4.

As it became smaller, the PLA became more professional, more technically advanced and less egalitarian, with differentiated pay scales between clearly defined ranks. Aware that it was in danger of losing the goodwill of the peasantry, and hence its influence over it, the PLA's political department drew up a new code of conduct in 1956, stressing the need to help peasants on collective farms.

After 1949, the PLA remained of pivotal importance to the PRC. Internally, it acted as a means of indoctrination (supervising the 800,000 young conscripts who were recruited each year for a three-year term), as a workforce in the many public works projects needed to rebuild the transport infrastructure after the civil war, and as a means of enforcing central government control in the regions (two of the four regional officials were high-ranking PLA post-holders).

Externally, the PLA's role was to achieve Great Power status for China, the opportunity for which soon arose in the Korean War.

Mao's dominant position within government

EXTEND YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Mao Zedong was the eldest son of a peasant family in the southern province of Hunan, born in 1893. His family's resources were sufficient to allow Mao to attend school rather than having to work full-time in the fields. He qualified as a teacher in 1918, but it was while working as a librarian in Beijing in 1919 that he became attracted to Marxism, becoming a founder member the new Chinese Communist Party in 1921. He helped to organise the United Front against the warlords in the 1920s, and when the Nationalists turned against their former allies, he helped to create the first Chinese soviet at Jiangxi, where he fought to develop his reputation within the Party and began to develop his ideas of a peasant-led revolution. However, it was only during the Long March of 1934–35 that Mao really began to impose his authority, and he consolidated this ruthlessly once the new soviet was established in the relative safety of Yanan. Yanan remained the Communists' base area until the Japanese surrender in 1945, when the civil war against the Nationalists resumed.

KEY TERM

The Rectification Campaign (1941–44)
A purge of Mao's enemies, real and imagined, inside the Party. Its success helped to cement his position as leader.

Mao had become Party leader in 1943 as a direct result of the **Rectification Campaign**, which not only confirmed his reputation as the leading party theorist, but also demonstrated his ability to impose his will on others.

EXTEND YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Rectification Campaign (1941)
Purges inside the Party tended to follow the pattern set in the Rectification Campaign of 1941. Starting with top officials, in this case Zhou Enlai, Peng Dehuai and Chen Yi, victims had to produce self-criticisms and confess to their mistakes. Then, the accusations would spiral down through the lower ranks of the Party, as members denounced each other, often on the flimsiest of grounds, before anyone else could denounce them. By 1942, over 15,000 alleged agents and spies had been unmasked and were then jailed. Having set the wheels in motion, Mao liked to remain above it all, until he decided to intervene to bring things to a close. Blame for any excesses could be passed on to someone lower down, whose zeal could be excused. In 1941, this was Kang Sheng, the Party security chief. The fate of those at the top who were accused varied – the purge of Gao Gang and Rao Shushi in 1954 signalled the end for both of them (see page 185), but in 1941, Zhou, Peng and Chen still had useful contributions to make and suffered no permanent career damage.

In October 1949, Mao was made head of state as well as of the Party, by his appointment as chair of the Central People's Government. However, although these posts gave him significant constitutional power, it was not absolute, because the collective leadership of the Party was theoretically responsible for policy, and key decisions were supposed to come out of debates in the Politburo. Nevertheless, Mao clearly expected to win these debates, and it was indeed Mao himself who set the pace and direction of policy, even in the early years – for example, over the decision to intervene in the Korean War in 1950, and then to attack the bourgeoisie in 1952 in the 'five antis' campaign.

There were, however, occasions when he had difficulty with colleagues. For example, the 1956 Party Congress removed references to Mao Zedong Thought as the guiding ideology of the Party

while Mao was unwell; it took him months to get the Party behind the Hundred Flowers campaign in 1956–57; and there were frequent disputes over the appropriate pace of introducing agricultural change. However, Mao was, without doubt, a formidable political manipulator, who could play people off against each other to great effect. He liked to think of himself as the modern equivalent of the first Qin emperor who had united China back in the 3rd century BC, and, as time passed, he became increasingly difficult to challenge.

Mao's main ideas

Early Chinese Communist thinking had been heavily influenced by advice from Moscow, which urged the Chinese to focus on building up the industrial workforce in the cities and developing it as the core of the future revolutionary party. Mao could see the futility of this in China, where only one percent of the population could be classed as industrial workers, and he adapted Marxism to suit Chinese conditions, where exploited peasants offered far greater revolutionary potential. Forced by the GMD to retreat to remote rural areas after Chiang Kai-shek turned on him in 1926, Mao had already begun to build strong links between the Communists and the peasantry, first in Jiangxi, then in Yanan.

The basis of what became known as Mao Zedong Thought comes from essays that Mao wrote during the Yanan years, which eventually became accepted as official party doctrine. The key elements can be summarised as nationalism, continuing revolution, listening to the people and mass mobilisation.

- **Nationalism**: like the GMD, Mao wanted to free China from the foreign exploitation that had undermined stability since the 19th century. Even the relationship with fellow Communists in Russia was fragile, and Mao was determined not to follow the Russian model slavishly, only to use the friendship to his advantage. If China's national interest clashed with any other element of his ideology, Mao invariably put nationalism first.
- **Continuing revolution**: 1949 was the start, not the end, of the Chinese revolution. In the early years, Mao had to work with those supporters of the GMD who stayed behind in Communist China, because he needed their expertise in running the administration and economy. This is why he said that capitalism should be regulated, not destroyed, and only limited nationalisation was carried out in 1949. However, such compromises were only tactical, and Mao was anxious that stability should not lead to complacency and stagnation. Each generation must actively participate in the revolution so that their revolutionary zeal would not fade. It was everyone's duty to be on the lookout for enemies within who might be trying to betray the revolution; and to examine their own behaviour and way of thinking, confessing to any errors they might have accidentally made. This approach is what lay behind the periodic purges of the CCP and the frequent **struggle sessions** that people endured, and also major events such as the Hundred Flowers campaign and the Cultural Revolution.
- **Listening to the people**: Mao believed the Russian Communists had gone wrong by failing to respond to people's concerns, thereby losing touch with them. In order to avoid this, he claimed he wanted people to get involved in discussing policy, so that the CCP could take people's views into account. Whether Mao genuinely believed this is debatable, as his behaviour during the Hundred Flowers campaign shows.
- **Mass mobilisation**: Mao argued that mass campaigns directed at achieving specific targets were the way forward. Numbers and revolutionary enthusiasm mattered much more than experts when it came to developing the economy, and China's huge population was its main asset.

KEY TERM

Struggle sessions
Organised to humiliate opponents and to frighten people into conforming. Victims who had been denounced by their colleagues or neighbours had to make full confessions and self-criticisms, and were frequently beaten viciously in the process.

After 1949, Mao left the details of making and implementing policy to others, but he made it clear what he thought the 'correct' ideological line should be. He periodically intervened to reinforce his position, by making people who had 'deviated' from the 'correct' path confront their errors in struggle sessions.

The growth of democratic centralism

Democratic centralism is a phrase usually applied to the way power was exercised in Communist Russia, but it also applied to China and was reaffirmed in the 1954 constitution as one of the principles on which the PRC was based. At the lowest level, there were elections to village and town councils, and these continued up through the system, as delegates from the lower bodies were

sent to represent people higher up. However, the entire process was controlled by the CCP, so the 'democratic' element is only theoretical. There was no choice of party.

The 'centralism' aspect was real enough. Political decisions were made at the top level by senior officials, who claimed to be taking into account the best interests of the people. Once taken, such decisions were imposed through the various levels of the system, without any further discussion. The justification for this was that only the Party leaders were sufficiently educated in the science of revolution to understand what course of action would best serve the workers.

Democracy means different things in different situations. In Britain, it is inextricably bound up with the idea of individual freedom, and it is generally accepted that the government should do whatever the majority of people say they want, while also taking into account the views of the minority. The French, however, place more emphasis on the role of the government to work out what is best for society, and, if necessary, to impose it against the wishes of minority groups. Chinese Communist leaders, several of whom had spent time in France, were more influenced by the French version. They certainly placed no importance on the individual.

As time went by, Mao's power became greater, but he became increasingly insecure. The more authority he gained, the more he feared losing it, and the more he feared enemies within were plotting against him, which helps to explain why there were so many internal purges and 'anti' campaigns.

AS Level Exam-Style Question Section B

How accurate is it to say that the political system put in place by the Communists after 1949 was authoritarian rather than democratic? (20 marks)

Tip

Make it clear early on that you understand what the two terms mean. Do not just list your evidence; explain what made the various features either authoritarian or democratic.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

The political system

1 Identify five features of the new political system that ensured that it would remain under Communist control.

2 What was the main reason why Mao was so keen on the idea of continuous revolution, and why?

3 Draw up and complete a table with two columns, one for the main features of British democracy and the other for features of the 'new' Chinese version.

4 Why do you think the Chinese view of democracy was so different from that of the British?

HOW EFFECTIVELY DID THE COMMUNIST PARTY DEAL WITH OPPOSITION?

Like Lenin in Russia, Mao deceived his potential opponents. He promised disaffected groups what they wanted and then, once his power was more secure, he broke the promises one at a time. Peasants were told that land would be redistributed, workers were promised higher living standards, minorities were offered autonomy, intellectuals were to be allowed freedom, and private ownership would continue for businessmen. The CPPCC conference that set the political tone of the early years even included members of the Democratic League, a splinter group from the GMD, to give the impression that politics would be inclusive.

Mao's initial priority had to be mopping up the remaining areas of GMD military resistance in the south and establishing political control over as much of China as possible. This involved sending the PLA into the GMD heartland of Guangdong province and into the outlying provinces of the far west, which had been asserting their independence from Beijing since 1912.

Once the Communist Party's hold on internal power was more secure, the pace of change speeded up. At the same time as Mao intervened in the Korean War, he also launched an internal wave of terror against enemies of the Party. The terror began in rural areas in October 1950, spreading to the cities in April 1951; by the time it ended later that year, it had accounted for at least one (possibly two) million lives. While direct violence may only have been inflicted on a small percentage of the population, fear affected everyone, and even people who overtly sympathised with the revolution felt compelled to educate themselves so they could quote the correct slogans to prove that they fully embraced the new ideology. A network of forced labour camps (*laogai*) awaited many of those who failed to do this.

After the terror, the next target of the regime was the professionals who had been asked to stay in their posts, but whose support became less important as time passed. Over a million government servants were sacked in the 'three antis' movement of 1951, in 1952, the business community was attacked in the 'five antis' movement (see page 184). In 1955, the drive to collectivise agriculture signalled an end to the brief period of peasant land ownership and, the following year, private businesses were nationalised. In 1957, it was the turn of the intellectuals to suffer in the Hundred Flowers campaign.

The reunification campaigns, 1949–50

There were three of these:

- **Guangdong**, a coastal province in southern China, had been the GMD heartland during the last months of the civil war, and the town of Guangzhou was the GMD capital. However, the GMD made no last-ditch effort to defend it, and the province capitulated to the PLA only two weeks after the PRC had been declared in Beijing. This did not mean the war was completely over – it dragged on in the far south until the end of 1950, and there were some nationalist forces in the far west that still needed to be dealt with.
- **Xinjiang** was the westernmost province of China, which had only been conquered by the Qing in the 1880s, and which the Russians had more recently been developing as a potential buffer state, in case of further Japanese expansion in the Second World War. Its population was ethnically mixed, but 80 percent were **Uyghurs**, most of whom were Muslims. By a combination of conquest and negotiation, the nationalist opposition in Xinjiang was subdued by the Communist Party. Local Uyghur leaders were offered key posts in the regional council, while Peng used the PLA to capture Urumqi, the provincial capital, at the end of 1949. Future Communist control was established by the appointment of a Long March veteran to run the local CCP and army unit, while large numbers of **Han** Chinese were brought in to work on construction projects. Xinjiang became a security buffer zone for the PRC.
- **Tibet** had been operating as an independent entity since 1913 and had announced its intention to resist Communist conquest. However, now that India was independent, the British were no longer interested in protecting Tibet, and the United Nations was too busy with Korea to do anything; Russia had agreed to allow China a free hand there, in return for a similar offer in Outer Mongolia, and it was too far from the USA for its direct influence to come into play. This left Tibet alone to face the PLA when it invaded in October 1950. Although it took six months, the conquest was relatively straightforward for China. In May 1951, Tibet came under Chinese sovreignty, and the PRC began a prolonged campaign to destroy Tibetan identity by bringing in large numbers of Han settlers and promoting a Chinese lifestyle. Local resistance was backed by the American CIA (anxious to make Buddhist friends in Vietnam) and escalated into a serious uprising in 1959, when the Dalai Lama (the Tibetan leader) fled to exile in India rather than waiting to be removed.

KEY TERMS

Uyghurs
Uyghurs are a central Asian ethnic group, and make up most of the population of Xinjiang. Most are Sunni Muslims.

Han
The Han people are the main ethnic group in China.

EXTEND YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Tibet
Like Xinjiang to the north, Tibet served as a valuable security buffer to China, and, to the Communists, this justified the level of international criticism that its occupation provoked. The Dalai Lama was only 15 when the PLA invaded Tibet. Initially, he wanted to co-operate with the PRC, visiting Beijing in 1954 as a delegate to the first session of the National People's Congress, and being appointed deputy chairman of its Standing Committee.

However, he changed his views to such an extent that he accepted asylum in India during the 1959 Tibetan uprising, deciding that the Tibetan cause could be publicised more effectively from exile. He has refused to return to Tibet, in case this is interpreted as endorsing the PRC, and continues to focus international attention on Tibet's plight to this day.

His deputy, the Panchen Lama, took over inside Tibet and supported the PRC until 1962, when he also incurred Mao's anger for endorsing a petition criticising the treatment of Tibet during the famine. He spent the next 20 years in jail or under house arrest.

The use of terror against opponents of Communist rule

Labelling

Within days of the declaration of the new republic, the police were deployed to root out potential nationalist sympathisers. Their task was made easier when the new government expanded the household registration system that the GMD had introduced in 1945. Every employed worker was assigned to a *danwei* (work unit) through which housing, food and clothing was allocated. The cadre in charge of each *danwei* was issued with a supply of food ration cards, distributed several times a month by the police – so the denial of these became a powerful device with which to enforce conformity, and the registration process itself enabled the party to pry into people's lives to an extent never seen before.

On top of this, every individual was given a class label that specified their family background, social status and occupation. There were 60 such labels, divided into three broad categories of 'good', 'middle' and 'bad', according to their presumed loyalty towards the revolution (see Figure 1.4 below). These labels were soon simplified further into 'red' or 'black' – in other words, friend or foe. Since children inherited the status of the head of their household in a family, these labels determined an individual's fate for years to come.

Good classes	Middle classes	Bad classes
Revolutionary cadres	Petty bourgeoisie	Landlords
Revolutionary soldiers	Middle peasants	Rich peasants
Revolutionary martyrs	Intellectuals and professionals	Capitalists
Industrial workers		
Poor and lower-middle peasants		

Figure 1.4 Class categories

Using this helpful information, the police were soon able to move beyond the obvious targets of known GMD sympathisers to monitoring members of the 'bad' classes, although even those of 'dubious' backgrounds were not victimised in the first 12 months if their professional expertise was contributing to the regime. Most professionals were sensible enough to take advantage of the 're-education' classes and libraries that sprang up in workplaces in the cities, so they could at least adopt the behaviour of conformists. Life was more difficult for those with more obvious nationalist connections, who might well find themselves writing lengthy confessions or being forced to recant in public. Even then, the reprieve earned by such behaviour might only be temporary, as everything was noted down in a dossier (***dangan***) that followed them thereafter.

KEY TERMS

Dangan
A dossier containing detailed personal information on anyone that came to the attention of the Party. Access to employment, housing or pensions depended on the contents of this, and the file was constantly updated once it was opened.

Triad
These gangs were criminal organisations that had long controlled urban crime, particularly currency trafficking, drugs and prostitution.

The crackdown on crime

In the short-term, the police were ordered to clean up the cities by removing a whole range of petty criminals and 'nuisances', preferably by relocating them to the countryside (ideally, to the far west) or, failing that, by locking them up. Beggars and prostitutes were particularly targeted. This was broadly popular among many urban residents, who longed to see order restored after so many years of war and chaos, but it proved an uphill task, as many of those rounded up and sent away simply drifted back as soon as they could, and the 're-education camps' were quickly full. The situation only got worse when the government began to demobilise soldiers from the PLA once the remaining nationalist resistance had been dealt with.

The clean-up was also the opportunity to tackle the more serious problem of the criminal gangs and **triads** that had been notorious for their influence on underworld crime, especially in Guangzhou and Shanghai. Over 150,000 criminals were arrested, over half of whom were executed.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

The Party

1 Give three reasons why it made sense for the Communist Party to take a relatively moderate approach to changing China at first.

2 Why was it worth putting so much effort into conquering the outlying western areas when they were so far away from Beijing?

3 Identify at least three practices that will have added to the bureaucratisation of the Party.

The suppression of counter-revolutionaries in the Great Terror, 1950–51

The Terror against counter-revolutionaries was launched at the same time as the PLA was sent into North Korea, in October 1950. The war gave Mao the perfect excuse to crush whoever still stood in the Communists' way at home, in case they jeopardised the gains of the revolution so far. Once the Americans had crossed into North Korea, at the start of October, the invasion of China itself seemed possible, so everyone at home had to unite. Severe measures against disloyal elements, however unpleasant, were seen as justifiable.

The Terror was brutal and widespread, designed not only to remove opponents, but also to deter others. Mao set the overall tone, but left those below him to work out the details. For example:

- **Tao Zhu**, known as 'the tank', due to his ruthless reputation, was dispatched to orchestrate the clampdown in Guangxi province on the Vietnam border. Here, particularly brutal treatment was required because of its lingering nationalist sympathies, and he proudly claimed responsibility for the killing of over 46,000 alleged bandits in the next 12 months, a ratio of 2.5 per thousand of the population.
- **Luo Ruiqing**, the head of security in Beijing, was responsible for transmitting Mao's wishes to the provincial leaders. Pressure from Luo led to the leader of Hubei province stepping up the killings in his area, from 220 in January 1951 to 45,000 by October.

As the killings threatened to get out of hand, Mao suggested that killing roughly one in every thousand of the local population in each area was an acceptable target. By suggesting that this figure could be adjusted according to local circumstances, Mao could pose as a voice of moderation if it suited him, but he was also making sure that officials below him took the actual decisions, and so were inextricably implicated in the terror.

In March 1951, Mao agreed to **Rao Shushi**'s proposal that the killings be extended to enemies inside the CCP itself. So many people were being arrested by the summer of 1951 that there was a bottleneck in the prisons, and arrests had to stop until sufficient numbers had been executed to create more space inside them.

KEY PEOPLE

Tao Zhu (1908–69)
A rising star, who rose to become fourth in the Party hierarchy, before being purged in the Cultural Revolution.

Luo Ruiqing (1906–78)
Served first as minister for public security and then, from 1959 to 1965, as chief of general staff in the PLA. However, he became a victim of infighting in the Cultural Revolution and spent the last 12 years of his life as a cripple, having tried to commit suicide by jumping out of a window.

Rao Shushi (1903–75)
Sometimes referred to as Rao Rashi, Party leader in Shanghai.

Initially, the Terror claimed fewer lives in the cities, partly due to fears of adverse publicity and partly because the urban professionals were still needed. However, this changed in March 1951, when a top-ranking military official was shot dead at a public concert in Jinan, the capital of Shandong. Mao demanded a quick response, and on the night of 28 April, police swept through 16 cities in a co-ordinated raid, arresting nearly 17,000 people. Confessions and executions followed, as well as a wave of suicides.

Young Party activists, hoping to advance their careers in the Party, were forced to watch mass executions to immerse them in the revolutionary experience.

AS Level Exam-Style Question Section B

Study Source 5 before you answer this question.

How much weight do you give the evidence of Source 5 (see page 184) for an enquiry into the use of terror in consolidating the Communists' hold on power in China in the early 1950s?

Explain your answer using the source, the information given about it and your own knowledge of the historical context. (12 marks)

Tip
Make sure you consider the limitations (for example, in range of dates and eyewitnesses) as well as the value of the source in the process of reaching your overall judgement.

SOURCE 5 An eyewitness description from Esther Cheo. She joined the PLA in 1949, at the age of 17, and was being groomed for promotion to cadre at the time of the scene in Beijing that she describes here in 1951. Here, her experiences are being reported by the historian, Frank Dikotter in *Tragedy of Liberation* (2013).

'We were taken in a lorry to the place of execution, near the famous tourist spot, the Temple of Heaven. The victims were kneeling down beside cheap coffins, their hands tied behind their backs with wire. About six security police moved nonchalantly along shooting them in the back of the head. As they fell, some of their heads split open, some just fell with a neat little hole, while others had their brains splattered all over the dusty ground and on to the clothes of the next victims.' As she turned away in revulsion, a cadre grabbed her (Esther) by the shoulders. 'Take a good look!' he shouted. 'This is what the revolution is all about!' She screamed and tried to hide her face, but he held her tight and forced her head round to make her look. She saw her companions running over the bodies, cheering.

No one knows exactly how many died in the year of Terror. A Party convention in 1954 was told that 710,000 had been killed in total, but some historians put the figure as high as two million. Several million were sent to labour camps or subjected to surveillance by local branches of the PLA. Countless more with 'black' labels became outcasts, and therefore targets of every subsequent political campaign (along with their children, who inherited the label).

Even those who survived the Terror with their reputations intact lived in fear. So many people had informed on friends in order to protect themselves that normal human relations changed – since friends knew most about you, the fewer friends you had, the less likelihood there was of being betrayed. Survival therefore encouraged people to become more isolated.

The 'three antis' and 'five antis' movements, 1951–52

The really bloodthirsty repression known as the 'Great Terror' calmed down in October 1951, but repression continued. The 'three antis' movement was launched at the end of the year, targeting corruption, waste and delay in the government and Party. The catalyst was the arrest in November of Zhang Zishan and Liu Qingshan, two leading members of the CCP hierarchy in Tianjin, charged with embezzling large sums from the Party. Mao insisted on their execution and put minister of finance, **Bo Yibo**, in charge of orchestrating a clean-up campaign. Employing the methods used earlier in the Yanan rectification campaign, mass meetings were held at which managers and officials were denounced by their work colleagues. Those accused were investigated by Party committees and, if found guilty, forced to issue humiliating confessions. A Ministry of Public Security manual, called 'How to hold an Accusation Meeting', made organisation easy.

Suspects accused of small-scale embezzlement were referred to as 'flies', while larger-scale corruption was pinned on 'tigers'. Before long, Tiger-Hunting Teams were trying to outdo each other, while Mao hinted at what might be regarded as an acceptable level of success, without getting directly involved. By the end of February 1952, Bo Yibo was proudly boasting that he had hunted down 100,000 'tigers' in east China. Some outsiders were impressed by the campaign, saying here was a party so determined to stamp out corruption that it was even prepared to shoot some of its own leaders. However, many who were actually involved knew only too well that the accusations were often false and it was fear that prevented people from standing up for each other.

The purge was widened in January 1952, to become the 'five antis' movement against bribery, tax evasion, theft of state property, fraud and economic espionage. A similar procedure of denunciation meetings was followed, but now Mao was directly targeting the bourgeoisie, who had been encouraged to stay in their jobs to help the new regime settle in. Party activists encouraged workers' groups to accuse their employers of criminal activities, the scope of which were so wide that they included practically anything. Denunciation boxes, into which written accusations could be dropped, speeded up the process. Once accused, a victim had such a negligible chance of acquittal that the main problem was getting his confession believed quickly, to shorten the ordeal of interrogation and imprisonment. Robert Loh, a manager in a cotton mill, recalled how he was kept locked up for four days in a bare room, containing only a bucket, until his seventh attempt to confess to Party officials was finally accepted. He was then allowed to face the crowd and confess in public.

KEY PERSON

Bo Yibo (1908–2007)
A former guerrilla fighter who had joined the Central Committee in 1945 and went on to become a leading economic planner in the 1950s. He was purged during the Cultural Revolution because of his moderate views.

SOURCE 6 Li Zhisui, *The Private Life of Chairman Mao* (1996). As his personal physician, Doctor Li knew Mao very well and became one of his closest confidants. After Mao's death, Li went to live in the USA, which is where the book was written.

In March (1962) when the State Commission on Science and Technology convened a meeting of scientists in Guangzhou, there was a moment to exonerate the scientists, despite Mao's known antagonism towards them. The country's scientists and intellectuals had never recovered from the anti-rightist campaign of 1957, when hundreds of thousands had been fired, demoted or sent to do labour reform. A pall of depression continued to hang over the intellectual community. Even those who had not suffered direct persecution existed in a perpetual state of fear, afraid to speak out, often unable to work in their chosen profession. Vice-Premier Chen Yi's speech at the conference set a new tone. 'There is something other people won't dare to say, but I will,' he declared to the embattled intellectuals. 'China needs intellectuals, scientists. For all these years they have been unfairly treated. They should be restored to the position they deserve.'

According to the historian Frank Dikotter, roughly one percent of victims were shot, another one percent were sent to labour camps for life, three percent were jailed for more than ten years and the rest were fined, although the fear of humiliation drove many to commit suicide. This in itself was difficult, as suspects were closely supervised. Nets were attached to break people's falls from high buildings, and parks were patrolled to prevent people hanging themselves from trees. One person who succeeded in committing suicide was the Dean of the Shanghai Law College, who threw himself into a river to drown as a result of the treatment he was receiving (see Source 7).

SOURCE 7 Robert Loh, *Escape from Red China* (2007). This comes from Loh's account of his own life in China, written after his flight to the USA. Here he is describing the fate of a colleague from the time he worked at Shanghai University.

He was made into the janitor at the trade association he had previously headed. He was paid 18 yuan a month and could live only by selling his household furnishings. His employers addressed him only to give him orders and wrote weekly reports on his behaviour. He himself had to go once a week to the police with a written expression of his gratitude to the party for the leniency of the people's justice; if his gratitude was not expressed in terms sufficiently abject, he was made to rewrite his paper until it was found acceptable. No one else dared speak to him, let alone try to help or comfort him.

He was supposed to be kept under surveillance like this for three years, but killed himself half way through his sentence.

A Level Exam-Style Question Section A

Study Sources 6 and 7 before you answer this question.

How far could the historian make use of Sources 6 and 7 together to investigate the impact of the 'anti' campaigns of 1951–57?

Explain your answer using both sources, the information about them and your own knowledge of the historical context. (20 marks)

Tip

Make sure to cover the full chronological range and be prepared to look at longer-term aspects of the impact that go beyond 1957.

Fines were a way of destroying the old business class by removing their wealth, and also contributed to the financing of the Korean War – although it may be argued that the chaos caused to normal economic activity by the movement did more harm than good to the economy.

The focus of the 'antis' movements had been on corrupt practices within the management levels of the Party and businesses. However, the top level of the Party was also purged by the attack on **Gao Gang** and Rao Shushi in late 1953, who were accused of infringing the ban on factions and building up their own empires inside the Party. Rather than face humiliation, Gao committed suicide; Rao was arrested and died in jail in 1975, over 20 years later.

KEY PERSON

Gao Gang (1905–54)
Rose to favour as a force in economic planning, but had over-reached himself and began plotting to replace Zhou Enlai as vice-chairman of the Party.

The affair reinforced Mao's position at the top and made the cadres lower down realise that it was dangerous to take opposition too far. This was a lesson that would become even more obvious during the Hundred Flowers campaign.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

The terror

1 Why do you think the authorities encouraged people to denounce each other? Explain three reasons.

2 What was the point of making it hard to commit suicide?

The development of the *laogai* system

The official explanation of the *laogai* camps was that they were places of re-education rather than of punishment. Misguided people who had failed to grasp the benefits that Communism had brought would be shown the error of their ways, before being eventually reintegrated as useful citizens. In reality, the system supplied the terror that the regime depended on in order to frighten most of the population into conformity.

Just as in Russia, where the gulag system developed, the existing Chinese prison system simply could not cope with the extra number of inmates produced by the Great Terror. Soviet experts were brought in to provide guidance on the management of a new labour camp system. By 1953, there were two million prisoners, over half of whom were working as forced labourers in *laogai*. As well as serving a political purpose, the camps were also of significant economic value, contributing some 700 million **yuan** in industrial products and 350,000 tonnes of grain to the state each year by 1955. Under the Great Leap Forward, prisoners were used as a convenient means of getting the most hazardous jobs done, such as mining and clearing malaria-infested swamps.

KEY TERM

Yuan
Also known as renminbi, the new currency introduced in 1950.

Socially, the prison population represented a cross-section of Chinese society, ranging from poor farmers in debt to the state, to technical experts accused of being counter-revolutionaries. However, nine out of ten inmates were political prisoners, and such was the backlog of cases that many had been working in them for years before they were formally charged. At village level, many farmers were sent to prison without any trial at all, and while it was widely accepted that a significant proportion of prisoners had been wrongly accused, there was no means of redress.

Prison conditions varied according to local circumstances, but were predictably brutal, involving constant fear of violence and frequent use of sleep deprivation and other forms of torture, not to mention the hard labour and poor diet.

Added to this was the psychological effect of **thought reform**, which involved endless self-criticism and indoctrination meetings, designed to make prisoners lose their previous identity.

KEY TERM

Thought reform
A form of mental torture where prisoners had to demonstrate that they had totally changed their way of thinking. It involved attending endless struggle sessions with other prisoners, where the only way of proving you had changed was by beating up other prisoners. One survivor called it 'the physical and mental liquidation of oneself, by oneself'.

The prison population ballooned again in 1955, when there was a further purge of counter-revolutionaries. A new layer of imprisonment, known as re-education through labour, was added to absorb a further 300,000 inmates. This system bypassed judicial procedures entirely: victims were sent without trial and could be held indefinitely in prison until the police, or local militia, who ran them decided they had been sufficiently 're-educated'. It was through this system that many people disappeared without trace in subsequent years.

Statistics for the numbers who died in the camps vary enormously, but it may have been as high as 25 million over the whole period, 1949–76. Even those fortunate enough to be released could rarely slot back into normal life, because they were frequently ostracised by others, who feared being branded as guilty by association.

Placing people under public supervision (*guanzhi*) was an additional way of responding to prison congestion. It involved placing convicts under the control of local cadres, who could use them to perform whatever menial tasks were required, and as handy scapegoats to be paraded around during public campaigns. It was a device used far more widely in rural areas. Luo Ruiqing spoke of 740,000 people under this system in 1953, but the figure is likely to be higher, as local cadres took the law into their own hands and could call on the local militia to back them up if required.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

The *laogai*

1 Explain two reasons why it was necessary to change the penal system as time went by.

2 Why do you think the *laogai* were such an effective means of exerting political control?

The Hundred Flowers campaign (1957) and its aftermath

By 1956, with the First **Five-Year Plan** coming to a close, Mao surprised everyone by calling for an open debate about its results and the future pace of change.

In April 1956, in an address to the CCP, Mao called on delegates to 'let a hundred flowers bloom, and a hundred schools of thought contend'. This apparent call for an open debate was at least partly influenced by recent events in Russia, where **de-Stalinisation** was leading to uncertainty.

KEY TERMS

Five-Year Plan
The plans, dealt with in Chapter 2, were intended to accelerate China's economic development over a five-year period.

De-Stalinisation
Three years had passed since Stalin's death in 1953, and Khrushchev, his successor, had just delivered his so-called 'secret speech' to the Party in Moscow, which began the process that became known as de-Stalinisation. Stalin was accused of having become so obsessed with developing a personality cult that he had lost contact with the people. Sensing a relaxation in Russia's grip over Eastern Europe, first the Poles, then the Hungarians, rose in rebellion in 1956, before being crushed.

Mao's call for a debate may have been prompted by his desire not to expose himself to the same criticisms that were being levelled at Stalin. However, the outbreak of the Hungarian rising later that year must also have made Mao realise that appearing too open-minded might backfire, by encouraging challenges to Communist rule. Although Mao had never trusted intellectuals as a group, he knew that they had a valuable contribution to make to the economy of China, and he may have been trying to win them over by giving them some opportunity to make constructive criticisms.

Mao continued to promote the need for a debate to the CCP Congress in November 1956, but still got no support, and repeated his hundred flowers theme in a major speech in February 1957. Given the trouble that anyone even accused of counter-revolutionary activity got into, it is little wonder that critics were slow to surface – particularly as the media campaign against **Hu Feng** had led to the arrest of a hundred or so intellectuals only two years earlier.

KEY PERSON

Hu Feng (1902–85)
A prominent writer who was accused of being a counter-revolutionary when he disputed the CCP's right to be the sole judge of artistic merit. This provided the pretext for a wide purge of intellectuals, thousands of whom were either expelled from the Party or jailed.

Frustrated with the lack of response, Mao summoned the editor of the *People's Daily* newspaper to demand news coverage be given to the debate, and then embarked on a stage-managed railway tour to 'engage' with the peasants and hear their views for himself. Finally, a trickle of comments did surface, which, as people gained confidence, developed into a flood of criticisms. Suggestions for improvement became denunciations of policies and even of individual leaders.

Suddenly – and the speed with which Mao acted may suggest he had been planning to do this all along – a halt to the debate was announced and Mao rounded on his critics, branding them as '**Rightists**', whose intention was to destroy the revolution. An anti-Rightist campaign was launched 'to squeeze the pus out of the abscess'. What began as a call for open expression became another exercise in Thought Control, which produced around half a million new inmates for the 're-education camps'. He accused them of wanting to turn back the clock by overthrowing the Communists and returning China to the rule of the nationalist bourgeoisie.

Mao's grip on the CCP tightened further, but the goodwill of intellectuals was lost for ever.

KEY TERM

Rightist
A blanket term that was applied to anyone Mao wanted to get rid of. The implication was that they had betrayed the principles of the revolution by being too far to the political right.

THINKING HISTORICALLY Evidence (3a)

Comparing accounts of the Hundred Flowers campaign

Read Source 5 and Extract 1 and then complete your own copy of the table below.

	According to Cheo	According to Short
Reasons why Mao invited criticisms		
Reasons why it can be seen as a blunder		
What it tells us about Mao's political methods		

EXTRACT 1

From Philip Short, *Mao: A Life* (1999). Short worked as a BBC foreign correspondent for 30 years and has written several books on China.

The Hundred Flowers was not, as Mao's victims and supporters both claimed, a carefully contrived trap from the start, an example of the Chairman's cunning in 'luring the snake out of its hole'. Nor was it a colossal blunder, as most western scholars argue.

Mao had always mistrusted intellectuals; their behaviour at Yanan had strengthened his conviction that they were fundamentally unreliable, and nothing that had happened since had done anything to alter that view. He didn't suddenly decide, in the spring of 1957 that they were trustworthy after all. He believed there would be a few 'extremists' who would have to be uprooted. Hence his refusal to give a blanket assurance that there would be no retaliation. Hence, too, a revealing slip of the tongue at a Party conference in March before the movement began, when he referred to intellectuals as the enemy, rather than potential allies to be won over.

On the other hand, the economic base of Chinese society had been transformed, and therefore in Marxist theory, the ideological 'superstructure' should follow suit. Throughout the campaign, Mao used the metaphor of hair and skin, arguing that now the old, bourgeois economic 'skin' had died, the intellectuals, the ideological 'hair', had no choice but to graft themselves on to the new 'skin' of the proletarian economy.

Mao misjudged the volume and bitterness of the criticisms, and what started as an attempt to bridge the gap between the Party and the people was turned on its head. It became a trap, not for the few, but for the many – for the hundreds of thousands of loyal citizens who had taken the Party at its word.

The tragedy was that Mao genuinely did want the intellectuals to 'think for themselves' and join the revolution of their own free will, rather than being forced to do so. He could not comprehend that if people had the freedom to think for themselves, they would think what THEY wanted, not what HE wanted.

EXTRACT 2 Frank Dikotter, *Tragedy of Liberation* (2013). Dikotter was professor of humanities at the University of Hong Kong. This extract comes from the first volume of his trilogy on Mao's China.

The Chairman was seeking consensus (over collectivisation) but he went much further than making economic concessions. Seeking to reclaim moral leadership over the Party he posed as the protector of democratic values: 'if what the democrats say makes sense, how can you not listen to them? If their abuse is reasonable, we can accept it, it is very useful for the Party, the people and socialism'.

The Hungarian revolt provided Mao with an opportunity to reclaim the initiative. He faulted the Hungarian CP [Communist Party] for allowing complaints among the people to fester and run out of control. He wanted a purge of the ranks in its Chinese counterpart to avoid a similar fate. What he proposed was nothing short of a new Rectification Campaign. The real danger was not workers or students, but 'bureaucratism' in the Party itself.

There was of course the danger that some intellectuals would voice counter-revolutionary ideas, but the Chairman was confident this would not happen again. Repeated campaigns of thought reform had produced a pliant intelligentsia.

Few, among Mao's colleagues, relished the prospect of another Rectification Campaign, but he sugared the pill by promising a 'gentle breeze and mild rain' for those who strayed from the path. In a speech to the State Council he repeated his call to 'let a hundred flowers bloom', and called on the public at large to help the CCP by airing their grievances so that social injustices could be redressed. No retaliation would be taken against those who spoke out...

[By June]... Around the country Party officials were taken aback by the torrent of criticism unleashed. In Beijing the Chairman was in a state of shock. According to his doctor, he stayed in bed, depressed, immobilised, re-thinking his strategy, plotting his revenge. Mao was planning a counter-attack, and asked the propaganda machine to encourage more people to come out and criticise the Party. He was particularly infuriated with the members of the democratic parties who proved to be so unreliable: 'nothing but a bunch of bandits and whores', he told his doctor.

On 8th June, an editorial in the *People's Daily* accused a small number of people of attempting to overthrow the government... on 11th June the speech he had given to the State Council three months earlier was published, but its conciliatory tone completely reversed. It was re-written to make it appear as if a trap had been laid for opponents of the regime all along, designed to 'lure the snakes out of their holes'. Mao was forced back into a temporary alliance with his opponents inside the Party and they too found unity behind their Chairman.

TO WHAT EXTENT DID INVOLVEMENT IN THE KOREAN WAR AFFECT THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PRC?

Just as the Bolsheviks' attempts to transform Russia into a Communist state were governed by the need to win the Russian civil war, so were the formative years of the PRC soon to be subordinated to the demands of war in Korea.

Korea had been occupied by Japan since 1910 and, when the Japanese left in 1945, the Russians invaded across its short common frontier and installed Kim Il Sung as leader in the north of the peninsula. Korea was then partitioned along the 38th parallel, below which the non-Communist south looked for support from the USA. However, as it became apparent that the USA was losing interest in Korea, Kim stepped up his interest in conquering the South for Communism.

War began in June 1950, when Kim did just this, but it immediately escalated when the UN authorised a force (mainly American) to defend the south. Mao was initially reluctant to get involved, but he was worried that an American victory would leave China vulnerable to attack from US bombers operating from North Korea. Therefore he did intervene when the UN/US force crossed into the North.

While fear of what the Americans might do to the PRC if they conquered Korea was important to Mao, he was manipulated into intervention by Stalin, who hoped to get Mao and Kim to deal with the Americans, without it draining Russia's resources.

The war's role in enhancing CCP control, suppressing opposition and promoting national unity

The war gave an indelible character to the PRC. While it denied it any chance of making a smooth transition into Communism, it did provide Mao with great opportunities to strengthen the grip of the Party and to deal with potential opponents.

Political effects at home

Mao took advantage of the outbreak of war to take more extreme measures at home. The basis of a militarised society had already been put in place during the first 12 months of Communist rule, but if the PRC was in danger of coming under attack from the USA as a result of events in Korea, then further measures to tighten the Party's control over the population would be needed and could easily be justified. Therefore, Mao launched the Great Terror against counter-revolutionaries in October 1950, as soon as the PLA were sent to the aid of North Korea. The 'three anti' and 'five anti' movements were set in motion soon afterwards. Using these methods, which could be justified by the threat to national security posed by the war, Mao was able not merely to destroy the lingering remnants of Nationalist opposition, but also to remove elements who might emerge as future opponents.

The wartime terror increased the power of the Party because local leaders were given key roles in organising its details, and ordinary workers were only too pleased to get involved by denouncing unpopular colleagues and exploitative bosses to Party officials.

Foreigners were already being put under pressure before October 1950, having been forced to register with their local Public Security Bureau. This pre-war hostility escalated into open persecution in wartime, when it became the government's aim to force foreigners to leave the country once they had been stripped of their assets. Life was predictably hard for Americans, who were branded as counter-revolutionaries, and also for **Christian missionaries**, who came in for particularly harsh vilification.

KEY TERM

Christian missionaries
Catholics found themselves in an awkward position. The Vatican ordered its missionaries to stay in their posts, while the Communists whipped up public hatred by levelling wild accusations about nuns murdering babies in orphanages. By the end of the war, there were still 200 Catholic missionaries in China, but only one Protestant missionary remained.

The one foreign group that did not leave were the Russians, who had been arriving in large numbers under the terms of the 1950 Sino-Soviet Treaty. They were soon joined by a new influx of military advisers, based mostly in Manchuria, near the war zone.

EXTEND YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Sino-Soviet Treaty (1950)
This was the outcome of Mao's visit to Russia in late 1949, when he had attended Stalin's 70th birthday celebrations and was looking to receive Stalin's blessing as leader of the second most important Communist state. Although Stalin treated Mao with respect in public, behind the scenes the story was different, with Mao left to his own devices for long periods in one of Stalin's *dachas* (state-owned country houses). Mao was willing to show Stalin that he had decided to 'lean to one side' (in other words, develop links with Russia rather than the West), but in return he expected Stalin to renounce his previous links with the GMD, with whom Stalin had been allied since 1945.

Zhou Enlai negotiated the treaty, but its details were more favourable to Russia than to China: in return for $300 million of credit, China had to hand over a large part of its bullion stock, with interest payable on the loan. China was to receive 10,000 Russian economic advisers, but it had to fund their generous salaries. The Russians also received economic concessions and extraterritorial rights in Manchuria and Xinjiang, which made the deal appear similar to the type of arrangement that foreign governments had imposed on the old Qing emperors before 1911. One thing Mao did get, however, was a list of all the Comintern agents still operating in China, most of whom were hunted down and killed soon afterwards. The Comintern was the Communist International, an organisation set up in 1919 to spread Communist revolutions around the world.

Mao also used the war to promote national unity. The Party orchestrated a concerted propaganda campaign against the USA, calling on people to 'Resist America, Aid Korea, Preserve Our Homes, Defend The Nation'. Mass meetings were organised in workplaces and schools, and the press went into overdrive in whipping up anti-American paranoia. Zhou Enlai took the lead in organising student demonstrations and patriotic parades where anti-American slogans were endlessly chanted. Although the participants in these rallies were often ignorant of the alleged evils of capitalist America, or of the reasons for fighting the war, the persecution of those who refused to participate ensured mass participation. Gradually these rallies, and the exposure to anti-capitalist propaganda, helped create a sense of unity in which Communist China was portrayed as bravely standing up against the forces of the hostile outside world. The rallies were also used by Party officials as means of applying pressure on people to volunteer for the PLA; although most military recruits were in fact conscripted by Party officials, who were given quotas to fulfil and they used whatever methods were effective.

In addition to giving up their time, people were also pressurised by the Party into donating their money and goods to help finance the war. Forced donations of anything up to three months' salary were collected from professionals in the cities, while farmers in the countryside saw their crops being compulsorily requisitioned. Taxes were raised to new levels.

In February 1952, Beijing raised the level of anti-American hysteria even higher by launching a germ warfare scare. Building on widespread public fears of aerial bombardment, it was claimed that American planes were dropping cylinders packed with germ-infested insects not only on North Korea, but also on Manchuria, as well as releasing rats and frogs contaminated with plague. The Party even organised a touring exhibition at which the public could inspect the evidence while listening to the confessions of captured American pilots being broadcast over the loudspeakers. The campaign continued until April 1953, when its credibility was undermined by the Russians, who declared it to be false.

Meanwhile, the Party had used the paranoia about health concerns to justify a campaign urging people to kill 'the five pests', of flies, mosquitoes, fleas, bedbugs and rats, along with announcing a more controversial cull of dogs, which as well as being a hazard to public health, were considered an ideological danger because keeping pets symbolised lingering signs of bourgeois decadence.

The human and financial costs of intervention in Korea

Manpower losses

The government never published figures for manpower losses caused by the war, but UN and Russian observers both put the figure at about one million lives. Most of these were conscripts, though they were officially referred to as 'volunteers', to make it harder for the Americans to blame the Chinese government directly and invade China, which was possible if the war went badly for the North Koreans. The 'volunteers' included Mao Anying, Mao's 28-year-old eldest son, who was working as an interpreter for Marshal Peng and was burned to death in an American incendiary raid on his headquarters. Hardly the most sensitive of characters in any case, Mao took the blow badly and became even more distanced from ordinary people and their sufferings after this. While the scale of losses was high (similar to those suffered by Britain in the First World War, but in a shorter time), to Mao this was unimportant, as the population was so vast that the losses would soon be made up.

The economy

The war had very damaging effects on the Chinese economy, which had to be entirely refocused in order to supply the military equipment and supplies needed to sustain three years of war. The financial cost of the war was colossal: over half of government spending in 1951 went on the military, and the annual budget for that year was 75 percent higher than that of 1950.

While a great deal of the military hardware was provided by Russia, the Chinese had to pay for all of it, as well as for the military expertise being provided by Soviet advisers.

The rest of the military equipment was produced in China, notably Manchuria, which was the centre of heavy industrial production. Food supplies for the army were only kept up by forced requisitioning from the countryside, particularly rice from Sichuan and bread from Manchuria. Such were the demands of the army that high levels of coercion proved necessary in order to obtain the food, with dire consequences on living standards, even famine, in some regions. Further difficulties were caused by the trade embargo on Chinese goods imposed by the USA when China entered the war, which caused a 30 percent fall in foreign trade in the first six months of 1951.

Perhaps even more damaging than the difficulties of acquiring and paying for war goods were the indirect economic consequences of the war for China. At the very time when the new Communist economy needed them, vital industrial resources were being diverted into the war in Korea. This delayed the development of China's industrial growth significantly, and was a significant factor in restricting the success of the First Five-Year Plan, launched in 1952. Moreover, the debts caused by military spending meant that the government had little to invest in education, health provision or vital aspects of the economic infrastructure, such as communications. Progress in all these fields was set back years by the cost of the war.

SOURCE 8 One of many propaganda posters produced during the war, 1950. American General Macarthur is seen committing war crimes in the foreground, while bombs fall behind him. The original caption read 'The Chinese people absolutely cannot condone the encroachment of other countries'.



THINKING HISTORICALLY Evidence (5a)

Context is everything

Work in groups.

Take an A3 piece of paper. In the middle of it, draw a circle about 20 cm in diameter. The area within the circle is for the evidence that comes purely from the source; the area outside is for the context.

1 Think of a question that Source 8 could be helpful in answering. For example, 'Why were the Chinese people so fearful of the Americans at the time of the Korean War?'

2 Inside the circle, write a set of statements giving information that can only be gleaned from the source itself, without any contextual knowledge. For example, 'The Americans were dropping bombs on cities during the war'.

3 Outside the circle, write down statements of contextual knowledge that relate to the source. For example, 'Zhou Enlai whipped up anxieties about the Americans to fever pitch by organising anti-American demonstrations in Chinese cities'.

4 Draw annotated lines between the contextual statements and the information from the source. Explain how the context changes the nature of the message conveyed by the poster.

5 Explain why knowledge of the context is important when gathering and using historical evidence. Give specific examples from this source and the situation inside China during the Korean War to illustrate your answer.

China's enhanced international prestige

The impact on the PRC's reputation in the world was mixed.

China's prestige was significantly boosted by the fact that its armies had held those of the USA at bay for the best part of three years. The PRC, rather than the Soviet Union, could now claim to be the most powerful Communist nation, since it was China that had made the sacrifices and shed her blood to defend Communism, while Russia had stood in the background. Furthermore, the preservation of a friendly, Communist North Korea gave China, and particularly Manchuria, greater security from attack in the future. The Korean peninsula would no longer be the weak point by which China's enemies attacked her.

On the other hand, there were downsides internationally. The USA was now the enemy, and American resolve to prevent dominoes falling to Communism in the Far East (known as **domino theory**) had been hardened. The CIA began plotting to undermine Chinese control of Tibet, and the Americans moved to replace the French in Vietnam soon after that. The Americans also pledged themselves to keep Taiwan out of Chinese hands, and would succeed in making sure that the PRC was refused admission to the United Nations until relations thawed in 1972.

Relations with the Soviet Union also suffered due to the war. Mao soon saw how he had been misled by Stalin at the outset, and also resented Stalin's failure to supply air cover to the PLA and get more directly involved in the fighting. It must have seemed that China had contributed far more to the cause of international communism than Russia. Ironically, Sino-Soviet relations grew worse still after Stalin's death, because, although he never trusted Stalin, Mao had far less respect for Khrushchev, whom he saw as a revisionist who had stopped the revolution before it was over.

KEY TERM

Domino theory
This was an American idea that the fall of one country to Communism would produce a knock-on effect on its neighbours, in the same way as the fall of a single domino causes the collapse of a whole row of them.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

Impact of the war on China

1 Draw up a two-column balance sheet, listing the harmful and beneficial results of the war for China. Make sure you have considered political, economic and international aspects of the war.

2 What do you consider to have been the most beneficial and most harmful outcomes as far as:

a) the Chinese people were concerned?

b) Chairman Mao was concerned?

ACTIVITY
SUMMARY

1 On a graph showing the time period 1949–57, plot the extent of repression used each year. Identify the highest and lowest points and explain them. Put the years along the horizontal axis, and use a scale of 1–10 on the vertical axis, to show the extent of repression used.

2 Do you think it is accurate to say that the Communist Party restored 'order', but not 'law' in this period? Justify your answer.

3 Select and explain three features of Mao's leadership from this period that demonstrate his skill as a political leader.

A Level Exam-Style Question Section B

How far do you agree that the most important consequence of the Korean War for the Communists was that it strengthened their control over China? (20 marks)

Tip
You will need to look at the whole range of consequences – political, economic, social and international – and make sure that you explain what makes this the most important (or an alternative, if you choose to argue differently).

WIDER READING

Channel Four DVD, *China – Triumph and Turmoil*, presented by Niall Ferguson (2012)

Davin, D. *Mao Zedong*, The History Press (1997)

Dikotter, F. *The Tragedy of Liberation*, Bloomsbury (2013)

Dillon, M. *China – A Modern History*, I.B.Tauris (2010)

Flint, A. 'What was the nature of terror in Mao's China?', *20th Century History Review* (February 2014)

Flint, A. 'Why did China enter the Korean War?', *20th Century History Review* (November 2013)

Spence, J. *Mao*, Phoenix (1999)

2a.2 Agriculture and industry, 1949–65

KEY QUESTIONS

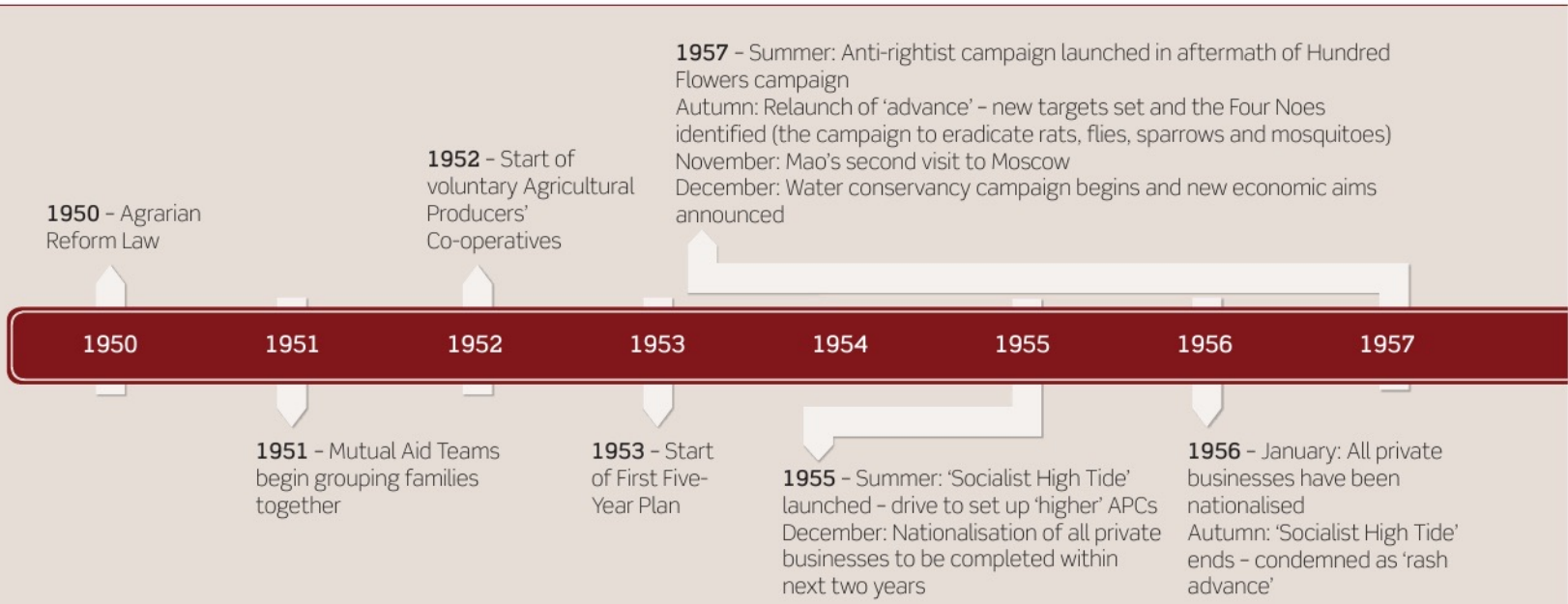
- How and why did the system of land ownership change during 1949–57?
- What was the impact of the People's Communes after 1958?
- How successful was the First Five-Year Plan, 1952–56?
- What was the impact of the Second Five-Year Plan, 1958–62?

Mao had used the peasantry to spearhead the Communist victory in 1949, but that did not mean he intended to keep China a peasant society. His overriding aim was always to modernise the country through urbanisation and industrialisation, an intention that had been made clear in the Common Program (see Chapter 1). Agriculture would have to be collectivised in order to feed the industrial workers and release peasants from the land to work in industry, but China's success as a Communist state would depend, above all, on the growth of industry.

However, economics was not Mao's strong point, and he dismissed the advice of experts when they identified problems, preferring instead to put blind faith in political willpower, supported by the mass participation of the peasantry. This is what he claimed had enabled the Communists to defeat the Japanese and the Nationalists (GMD), and this is what he said would carry them forward in the future. Unfortunately for the Chinese people, this approach was to lead them to economic disaster in 1960.

Land was redistributed from landlords to peasants very quickly, but the subsequent change from peasant ownership to collectivisation was initially slow – and at first carried out on a voluntary basis. However, it was dramatically accelerated in 1955, and had been completed by 1957. In 1958, the Great Leap Forward (GLF) involved the merging of the collectives into much larger communes, which were intended to become the basis of a fully Communist society. All private belongings were to be surrendered to the state, which, in return, would provide for everyone's needs.

Initially, Mao envisaged modernising industry through a series of Five-Year Plans based on the Russian model, but these did not begin until 1952, because the economy had to be stabilised first. The First Five-Year Plan, which lasted until 1956, was broadly successful in achieving its targets; the second (which formed part of the Great Leap Forward) was a disaster and, combined with the mistakes made in creating the communes, led to a man-made famine responsible for at least 20 million deaths. This was to be the key turning point in the development of China, such were its consequences.



Although Mao refused to accept blame for the famine, he was forced to allow a retreat from the Great Leap Forward, and the early 1960s saw a more pragmatic approach to the economy and a limited recovery.

HOW AND WHY DID THE SYSTEM OF LAND OWNERSHIP CHANGE DURING 1949–57?

EXTRACT 1 In his biography of Mao (*Mao: A Life*, 1999), the historian Philip Short explained the importance of having land when he wrote:

> In rural China, the possession of land gave life: if you had fields, you could eat; without fields, you would starve. Among a nation of four hundred million, 90% of whom were peasants, land redistribution was the primary vehicle carrying the revolution forward.

The Communists had learned lessons in carrying out land redistribution in the areas they controlled before they acquired power in 1949. In both the Jiangxi Base Area, and later in Yanan, landlords had been driven out and their land redistributed, but richer peasants (those who owned land, but did not rent it out to tenants) were not targeted because they were the most productive. Whether or not this approach was too moderate had caused arguments inside the Party, but this was the basis of the approach followed once the whole country was under Communist rule.

Attacks on landlordism and the redistribution of land

The 1950 Agrarian Reform Law laid down the legal framework under which land reform took place, claiming that it would eradicate exploitation of peasants by 'the landlord class' as a first step towards industrialisation. It was hoped that the legislation would restrain overzealous activists from taking the law into their own hands, which is what had begun to happen during the civil war. It also made it clear that land reform meant redistribution, not lower rents or low interest loans, which the Communists had been experimenting with earlier.

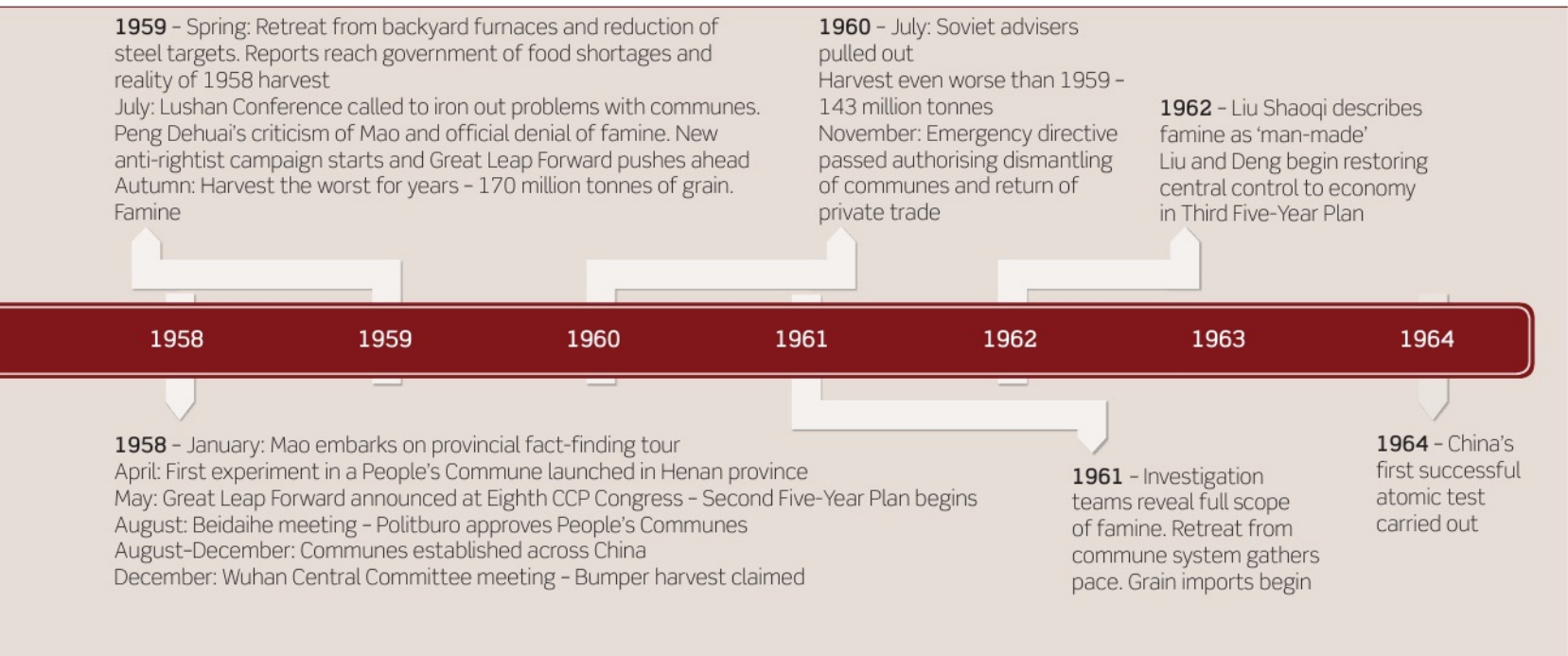
EXTEND YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Agrarian Reform Law (1950)

This portrayed landlords as the 'ruling class' in the countryside. However, the question of whether there really was a distinct landlord class that oppressed the peasantry has not been answered definitively. The language used by some historians (such as Philip Short) suggests they accept its existence; others (notably Frank Dikotter) argue that, while there were landlords, they did not dominate society to the extent of being a 'ruling class', and were not universally hated as such. Mao, however, needed to create the impression that such a ruling class actually did exist and deserved to be hated, in order to rally the peasants to his side and to justify his claim to have successfully adapted Marxism to fit Chinese circumstances.

Interpretations of the situation differ due to the lack of detailed evidence of Chinese society, as well as historians' ideological preferences. The only systematic and detailed survey of farmers was that carried out between 1929 and 1933 by Nanking University. It studied data from 16,000 farms across 22 provinces and concluded that only six percent of farmers were tenants, and they were generally not poorer than those who owned the land they farmed. Most farms were small, and although most farmers had to supplement their income by extra activities, they did not blame land tenure for this situation. The evidence of this survey alone, therefore, suggests that it is an exaggeration to portray landlords as an exploitative ruling class, but as the survey did not cover the whole country, the picture remains unclear.

The army played a crucial role in the land reform process by silencing those who might have been hostile to the new government and helping the local Party officials organise work teams. The first job of the work team was the unpopular task of calculating how much land people owned so that they could be



taxed accordingly. They then organised meetings to decide how each villager should be labelled: 'landlord', 'rich peasant', 'middle peasant', 'poor peasant' or 'labourer'. 'Landlords' were publically humiliated and accused of exploitation. If they were found guilty, as was usually the case, their land and possessions were confiscated and divided up among the other villagers. The victims were then beaten up, and executed, often by the villagers themselves.

By the end of 1951, some ten million landlords had lost their land and about 40 percent of the land had changed hands. Official figures put the number of deaths at 700,000, while Chang and Halliday's estimate is as high as three million.

EXTEND YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Jung Chang and Jon Halliday

As a young Red Guard, Jung Chang had participated enthusiastically in the early days of the Cultural Revolution. However, the persecution suffered by her parents and the disruption of her education convinced her that the young had merely become victims of Mao's manipulation. This disillusion was intensified by her experiences in the rustication campaign after 1968, and she settled in Britain after winning a scholarship to study there in 1978.

Her husband, Jon Halliday, is a professional historian. Unsurprisingly, therefore, their biography of Mao, published in 2005, paints the regime in a very negative light and uses statistics selected accordingly.

SOURCE 1

A photograph taken in 1952, showing a farmer, Huang Chin-Chi, kneeling before a people's tribunal in an improvised outdoor court at Fukang, a county in the Province of Kwangtung. Huang, who owned only two-thirds of an acre of land, was found guilty of exploitation and shot. The events were documented by the Communists' own photographer, and the photos were later smuggled out of China. The story was found to be authentic by the US Consulate General in Hong Kong.



ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

What impression does Source 1 convey about the way in which land reform was carried out?

Party-led work teams put considerable time and effort into whipping up anti-landlord paranoia in villages, by digging up old grievances against better-off individuals and by offering the prospect of a share in the confiscated spoils of those found guilty of being landlords.

Putting power in the hands of the poor and middle-ranking peasants, who had conducted these 'speak bitterness' meetings and passed the sentences against landlords, enabled the Party to underline its claims that this was a peasant-led revolution against the old landlord class. By making sure that it was the villagers themselves who carried out the killings, the Communists were implicating them to such an extent that there was no turning back.

EXTRACT 2 P. Short, *Mao: A Life* (1999).

... peasants who killed with their bare hands the landlords who oppressed them were wedded to the new revolutionary order in a way that passive spectators could never be.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

Land redistribution

1 Explain why the idea of land redistribution was popular with:
   a) the peasantry
   b) the Party.
2 What do you think was the main danger for the Party of redistributing land?
3 What was the overriding aim behind all of the changes to land ownership?
4 What was the point of directly involving the villagers in dealing with landlords?
5 Why do you think it was necessary for the work teams to stir up old grievances?

Moves towards agricultural co-operation

The Party never intended the peasantry to become established as a new class of landowners, and therefore moves towards **collectivisation** began rapidly.

Mao hoped that a measured approach to this, taken before the peasants got used to owning more land, would avoid a repeat of the disastrous situation experienced by Stalin in Russia. Stalin had encountered so much resistance to collectivisation that he ended up eliminating the *kulaks* (better-off peasants) as a class. However, in Russia, the peasants had already been in possession of the land for ten years and had become used to life under the **New Economic Policy**, so there was bound to be resistance to change there.

The moves towards collectivisation passed through several stages because the party improvised as they went along, depending on circumstances. Mao said that it would take about 15 years to complete.

From 1951, groups of ten or so families were encouraged to unite to form Mutual Aid Teams (MATs), in which they could pool their labour, animals and equipment, while retaining their rights of private ownership. This happened anyway at busy times of year, but it was now being formalised as a permanent arrangement and managed by the **peasant associations**. While membership was voluntary, it soon became apparent that individuals who remained outside the MAT would find it hard to get hold of resources, and villagers who stayed out on their own ran the risk of persecution.

KEY TERMS

Collectivisation
The process whereby the state takes over the ownership of land and equipment that was previously in private hands. Collective farms are managed by the state, which supplies the peasants with food and accommodation in return for their labour.

New Economic Policy (NEP, 1921–28)
Russia had become so short of food during the civil war (1918–21) that Lenin had decided to restore capitalist practices to the Russian countryside by introducing the NEP. This allowed peasants to sell their produce and keep the profits once they had paid their taxes to the state. While the NEP did feed the countryside, it did not produce a sufficiently regular surplus with which to feed the urban industrial workers who were required for industrialisation. This was a major reason why Stalin ended it in 1928, replacing it with collective farming.

Peasant associations
Organisations originally created in the 1920s to help peasants to defend their rights and campaign for lower rents. They were revived in the 1950s by the work teams in order to get the villagers used to the idea of collective activity.

EXTEND YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Peasant associations
Peng Pai (an early pioneer of the revolutionary peasant movement, who was killed by the GMD in 1929) created the peasant associations in the 1920s in Guangdong province. The associations had been so successful that the Party had backed away from them. At this point in time, the Communists were still working with the GMD in the United Front and had not yet decided whether to focus on the industrial workers or the peasants. They were afraid that the associations would commit them too closely to the peasants. By the 1950s, it was clear that the peasants came first.

In 1952, successful MATs were encouraged to combine and form Agricultural Producers' Co-operatives (APCs) of 40–50 families. In APCs, land could also be pooled and could therefore be consolidated into larger units and cultivated more efficiently than in traditional strips. Families with larger holdings were still allowed to keep back some land for their personal use, while renting the rest to the APC, which was a strong incentive for richer families to join. Profits were shared out at the end of the year, according to resources contributed and food produced.

The change from voluntary to enforced collectivisation

Mao was frustrated at the slow pace at which the APC system was developing (only 14 percent of rural households were in APCs by March 1955), but he continued to follow a cautious approach until 1955, responding to circumstances as they arose and frequently changing tack.

In their desire to respond to Mao's wishes for faster change, many local officials had rushed into creating APCs before they had been properly planned. Consequently, these APCs had gone into debt because they had to borrow money to buy equipment, prompting Mao to call for a slowdown in the spring of 1953.

However, once things stabilised again in 1954, peasants started buying and selling their land and food, just as they would under capitalism. This apparent rejection of revolutionary values infuriated Mao, who then condemned the previous slowdown as a 'rash retreat', and renewed the pressure on peasants to join APCs. However, even when better-off peasants did bow to local pressure and reluctantly joined the local APC, they often slaughtered their animals and ate them rather than handing them over, in scenes reminiscent of forced collectivisation in Russia. When the 1954 harvest was poor, this prompted the government to requisition grain in order to get enough to feed the cities. However, this caused so much rural protest that, in January 1955, Mao did another U-turn and announced a policy of 'Stop, Contract and Develop', calling for a halt to APC development for the next 18 months.

Then, only six months later, in July 1955, Mao made up his mind to go for all-out collectivisation when he announced to a Conference of Local Party Secretaries that a full-scale drive would be started immediately. This time, there was to be no turning back. From 17 million households in APCs in July 1955, the figure grew to 75 million by January 1956, until, by the end of the year, only three percent of peasants were still farming as individuals. The official reason given for the drive to collectivisation was that it was in response to the demands of the peasantry, an illusion that Mao helped foster by publishing 'Socialist Upsurge in the Countryside', a selectively edited compilation of favourable reports on collectives written by local activists. The real reason was more likely to have been Mao's fear that supplies to the cities would continue to be unreliable as long as peasants still owned the land. Like Stalin, he saw the peasants as so instinctively reactionary that they needed to be forced into collectives, where the state would operate as their landlord, otherwise they would revert to capitalism at the first opportunity. Mao summed up the situation when he said, 'the peasants want freedom, but we want socialism.'

EXTEND YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Mao's skill at political manipulation

Announcing the decision to collectivise to a Conference of Local Party Secretaries was a means of bypassing the higher bodies within the Party that such decisions would normally have gone through. Inside the higher echelons of the Party there was considerable opposition to moving so fast, but if Mao could publically announce it elsewhere, it would be very hard for the decision to be rescinded.

Most of these new APCs were classed as 'higher' (HPCs), and consisted of 200–300 households. In an HPC, peasant families no longer owned the land or the equipment, and the profits at the end of the year were shared out according to work points earned by the labour contributed. This meant that those who contributed the most land and other assets might find themselves receiving the same rewards for their labour as those who had surrendered the least in terms of material possessions.

EXTEND YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Why peasants joined co-operatives

It may seem odd that some peasants, especially the richer ones with the most to lose, joined APCs or HPCs when they clearly did not want to. The explanation was that the Party had become so well entrenched at a grass-roots level that they were able to apply intolerable levels of pressure on reluctant individuals, using a combination of fear and ridicule to isolate them from the mainstream. Only the very thick-skinned could withstand this, and only a tiny minority of three percent did so. The other reason was financial: banks had been nationalised in 1949 and would not lend money to individual peasants who stayed outside the co-operative.

Ideologically, collectivisation was a tremendous success for Mao because the state now owned the means of production of food, the land, on which 90 percent of the population worked. This was Chinese Marxism in action. Politically, it was more of a mixed blessing for Mao: the fact that it had been carried out far more quickly than imagined was a tribute to his authority within the Party, and his ability to outmanoeuvre powerful conservative opponents such as the premier, Zhou Enlai. Furthermore, the actual process of carrying out the changes greatly increased the control the party exerted over local people at grass-roots level. However, collectivisation also marked a distinct change in the relationship between the CCP and the peasantry, who now became servants of the Party, rather than loyal allies whose support had to be earned. In addition, the speed with which the big surge towards higher-level APCs was achieved made Mao dangerously overconfident. He no longer worried about practical obstacles that stood in the way of change, and this was soon to lead to catastrophic mistakes in the Great Leap Forward of 1958.

In economic terms, the impact of collectivisation was disappointing. Over the period of the First Five-Year Plan, food production had increased by 3.8 percent per annum, but this was still insufficient to sustain the growing industrial workforce, which was growing even faster. The basic problem was that the amount of cultivated land per head of the population was so low. Yields per hectare were quite high, but labour productivity was low, and it would have been hard for the peasants to produce a surplus, whether collectivised or not. The situation was worsened by the lack of state investment in agriculture and the demotivating effect created by the fact that people no longer owned their own land, so they did not directly benefit from the work they put in.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

Collectivisation

1 Fill in a timeline like this to check your understanding of the sequence of events between 1950 and 1957. Allocate one row to each year.

Year	Main development and brief explanation of what it entailed
1950	Agrarian Reform Law – enabled redistribution of land to be organised at village level. 'Landowners' identified, property shared out, punishments inflicted.
1951	
1952	

2 How easy was it to collectivise agriculture? Put each of the factors below into a table. Next to each factor, explain why it made collectivisation easier or harder to organise (or possibly both).

Factors to consider: Communist experience of land reform in Yanan in the1930s and 1940s; the zeal of Party activists; regional variations in land ownership; internal Party disputes about the pace of change; the war years making people accustomed to higher levels of violence; fear of US invasion from Korea, 1951–53; the shortage of industrial goods; the Soviet Union's experience of collectivisation; shortages of land in some regions (such as Sichuan); the strong links between the CCP and the peasantry that had been forged before 1949; the huge number of peasants.

3 Was collectivisation supposed to be more productive than private ownership? Identify and explain at least three reasons for each side of the argument.

WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE PEOPLE'S COMMUNES AFTER 1958?

Mao returned from his second visit to Moscow in November 1957, impressed by the Russians' achievement in launching a **sputnik** into space, but nevertheless determined to modernise China independently in the future. While in Moscow, he had already announced plans to overtake Britain as an industrial power within 15 years, but the question he faced on his return was how to do this. His answer was by merging the collectives into much larger units and making them responsible for a wide range of activities in addition to farming – industrial production, education, welfare provision and local defence.

Reasons for launching the Communes

Mao had been delighted with the speed at which collectivisation had been carried out, and he continued to seek ways to maximise food production in order to accelerate industrial growth. The idea of bigger collectives, in the form of communes, had an obvious appeal, since they ought to enable the pooling of even larger resources of equipment and labour. This should mean higher food yields and more peasants being freed up to work on construction schemes.

The initial steps came from enthusiastic cadres in Henan, who claimed that the local APCs were asking to merge so they could share their resources and therefore release more manpower for the water control projects that were being launched in the winter of 1957–58. Such initiatives impressed Mao, who had embarked on a fact-finding tour of the countryside in the spring of 1958. Mao returned to Beijing determined to press ahead with radical solutions, convinced that he had the backing of both the peasantry and the local Party activists for a more ambitious collective scheme. Armed with first-hand evidence, even if it was of questionable accuracy, he was able to get both Liu Shaoqi, the vice chairman of the CCP, and Deng Xiaoping, the CCP secretary general, to put their support behind the idea of People's Communes.

A further, ideological, reason for wanting to press ahead with the communes was Mao's determination to prevent the revolution losing impetus. If collectives were simply allowed to evolve at their own pace, he feared the revolution would be in danger of becoming becalmed by the bureaucrats, who preferred to keep the status quo because it was less trouble. If 600 million people could be mobilised as active participants in the Great Leap Forward, there would be no chance of this happening.

How the Communes were organised

It was for the above reasons, therefore, that a radical new policy initiative (officially known at the time as the Three Red Banners, but normally referred to as the Great Leap Forward) was announced at the Eighth CCP Congress of May 1958. The Great Leap Forward would involve developing industry and agriculture at the same time, in what Mao referred to as '**walking on two legs**'. The People's Communes that had already been created were to be expanded, and the labour force was to be mobilised on water conservancy and other civil engineering schemes. Mao had faced bitter opposition from conservatives within the CCP leadership during the previous months, but he had now succeeded in getting this new direction endorsed by the Congress, where he also repeated his claim that China would overtake Britain as an economic power, reducing the time it would require to do so to seven and a half years.

Production of steel and grain were to be given equal priority. It was the task of the farmers to produce the grain in order to feed the workers, who would make the steel. As the planners liked to put it, 'General Grain' would produce the food, and 'General Steel'

KEY TERMS

Sputnik
The first satellite sent into space, in 1957. Russia's achievement caused consternation in the USA, and escalated the Cold War by starting the so-called 'space race'.

Walking on two legs
This would clearly differentiate China from Russia. Up until this time, China had followed the Soviet model of giving industry priority over agriculture, but from now on, both were supposed to develop at the same pace, so China would be walking on the two legs of industry and agriculture.

would turn China into a modern economy. However, Mao was determined to achieve this by decentralising economic planning, so that enthusiastic local officials could push changes forward without being restrained by government technical experts.

The first People's Commune, known as the Sputnik, had already been established in Henan province in April 1958. It involved the merging of 27 collectives and brought over 9,000 households under its control. Mao chose the term 'People's Commune' because he wanted to recreate the spirit of the Paris Commune of 1871. This was a left-wing workers' government that ran the city for several months, in defiance of the government, after the Franco–Prussian War. In China, as in Paris, the people themselves were setting up the communes, but, unlike in France, the Chinese government was endorsing their actions, not repressing them. When Mao embarked on a further provincial tour in August, he used the example of Henan to inspire local cadres in neighbouring provinces to follow their example.

Over the next two years, the 750,000 collectives were merged into some 26,000 communes, which in total contained about 120 million households. Once a commune was set up, it was not possible to move elsewhere without an internal passport.

Communal living

All communes had their local variations, and to some extent, the shift to the commune system was an exercise in rebranding, in the sense that villagers often stayed in the same houses and continued to work alongside the same people as before. However, there was now an extra sense of communal identity, especially where peasants ate together in the communal canteens and slept in communal dormitories. Where this was the case, couples could only sleep together on arranged conjugal visits.

Peasants' working lives were directed by new management teams, who divided them into production brigades, usually comprising one village, and smaller production teams. Typically, the commune would have a tractor station to provide tractors for brigades that could not afford them and to carry out repairs. The commune would also organise whatever industrial enterprises were feasible locally – for example, flour mills, brick works, tool repair workshops and, above all, backyard furnaces (see page 207) for smelting steel – as well as allocating labourers to work on new construction projects.

However, the commune was more than just a huge collective farm, because it was supposed to become the unit of local government and take over responsibility for providing local services, such as education, public health, policing and the militia. It could also provide childcare and canteen facilities, to free up women for other work, and 'happiness homes' for the elderly. Parents were encouraged to abandon 'bourgeois emotional attachments', in favour of a regimented lifestyle where they worked long hours purely for the communal good, not for their own benefit. Freeing people up from domestic responsibilities allowed the commune managers to deploy them in civil engineering projects, usually water conservancy and irrigation schemes, or building new roads and bridges. Mao spoke quite recklessly about what the communes might achieve, suggesting it was time to put into practice some ideals of '**utopian socialism**'. There was even talk of moving away from a monetary economy, and the most advanced communes claimed to offer people the ten guarantees of meals, clothes, housing, schooling, medical attention, burial, haircuts, theatrical entertainment, money for heating in winter and money for weddings. Once the countryside had been fully transformed, the plan was to extend the commune system to the cities, where offices and businesses were to operate along similar lines.

KEY TERM

Utopian socialism
When socialism is reached by persuading the capitalists to voluntarily share their wealth for the communal good.

The abolition of private farming

Unlike the collective, where membership had been at least theoretically voluntary, villagers had no choice about being absorbed into the commune. When they did so, they had to surrender all of their private property – land, agricultural equipment, livestock and household possessions – without any form of compensation. In this way, private farming was abolished. There was theoretically no need for personal possessions anyway, because the commune would feed everyone in the communal mess halls, and the desire to own material goods was supposed to wither away as communist values became accepted as the norm.

Whereas under the collective system, peasants had been rewarded with work points for the work they contributed, this was now pointless, because the state was supposedly providing for everybody's needs. However, unless villagers were inspired by the ideology of working in partnership with each other towards a common goal, this reduced the motivation to work hard, since the rewards would be the same regardless.

Nevertheless, while individuals might have lost motivation, they were compelled to work hard by team leaders, who competed to out-produce neighbouring communes. Theoretically, everyone was supposed to have six hours sleep every two days, while some team leaders boasted that their teams worked much longer without breaks. In reality, such efforts could not be maintained, and many villagers simply did as little as they could get away with, while keeping up appearances.

The loss of personal freedom that went with the loss of personal possessions was emphasised by the military dimension to the communes, which went much further than the mere organisational vocabulary of brigades, divisions and units. Everyone between the ages of 15 and 50 had to be militia members and periodically train with weapons; marching together to work was common practice, and peasants worked in the fields with antiquated rifles stacked alongside them, to invoke the spirit of fighting for a better future. This was all part of the drive towards a new mindset, where individual wishes were subordinated to the communal good, and of course it made discipline easier to enforce.

Lysenkoism

Trofim Lysenko was a Ukrainian agricultural scientist, whose theories Stalin had relied upon in the aftermath of the Russian famine of the early 1930s. Mao ought to have known better than to trust his ideas, because they were already being discredited by the time of the Great Leap Forward. However, in 1958, Lysenkoism was made official policy, when Mao himself drafted an eight-point programme based on Lysenko's ideas, which farmers had to follow. Some of them were common sense (development of new farm tools, use of new breeds and seeds, improved field management, increased irrigation), but others (close planting, deep ploughing, increased fertilisation and pest control) were potentially dangerous – especially if all were used together, which was Mao's directive.

The most obviously catastrophic was pest control, which focused on killing birds to prevent them eating seeds. Peasants wasted hours banging pots and pans together to prevent birds from landing, until they fell exhausted from the sky, but the result seriously upset the ecological balance. Insects (particularly locusts) and small creatures the birds normally ate multiplied uncontrollably and destroyed the plants; so too did rats and vermin, which destroyed grain stocks. The focus on increased fertilisation of the soil also led to the destruction of thousands of peasants' homes, which were ploughed into the ground because the animal dung used in the construction of the walls was thought to be useful. Although communes were supposed to supply accommodation to those who lost their homes in this way, the reality was that thousands of peasants were forced to seek shelter wherever it was available.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

Lysenkoism

For each of the eight points in the programme based on Lysenko's ideas, explain one reason why it might not have been appropriate in China at this time.

The great famine of 1958–62

At the CCP Central Committee meeting in December 1958 at Wuhan, Mao announced that the commune system was now successfully in place and the whole of the countryside had been collectivised into some 26,000 communes. He also declared that the harvest figure for the year had been a record 430 million tonnes of grain – a figure that even the Party thought impossibly high and revised down to 375 million before making it public. However, it is now known that, despite excellent weather, the real figure was closer to 200 million tonnes, and Mao may not have been as confident as his claims made him appear. At the same meeting, Mao announced that he was stepping down as Chairman of the PRC, while remaining chairman of the Party. He claimed to dislike the formal duties that came with being head of state and was handing these over to Liu Shaoqi. While this did not weaken his power, because the Party was where real authority lay, it can be seen as a tactical retreat that would make it easier to shift blame on to others should the Great Leap Forward run into trouble. Up to this point, Mao had dismissed what criticisms he had heard as coming from individual pockets of hunger, which were exceptions to the overall picture of plenty.

However, the decision, in July 1959, to call a special party conference at Lushan was a clear sign that Mao knew the Great Leap Forward was running into serious difficulties. Despite critical mutterings behind the scenes, at Lushan, only **Peng Dehuai** came out openly to challenge the wisdom of the plan, when he wrote a letter to Mao outlining his concerns.

KEY PERSON

Peng Dehuai (1898–1974)
A Long March veteran, with a reputation for straight talking, and a history of falling out with Mao. He led the PLA in the Korean War and became defence minister in 1954. When he returned to his native province of Anhui, he saw for himself the extent of suffering caused by the Great Leap Forward.

Taking this to be an attack on his own authority, Mao published the letter and challenged the delegates to line up either with himself or with Peng. Any chance Peng had of surviving was ruined when Soviet Premier Khrushchev made a critical speech in Russia that raised similar points to those made by Peng. This made it look as though Peng had gone behind Mao's back to brief Khrushchev when he had been abroad the previous month. A special Politburo meeting sacked Peng, replacing him with Lin Biao, the leader of the PLA. Although he was not arrested until the Cultural Revolution, Peng's political career was effectively over.

Only the aged Marshal Zhu De spoke up for Peng; Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping developed convenient illnesses that prevented them attending the Politburo meeting; and Zhou Enlai was so ashamed of his failure to stand by Peng that he drank himself into a stupor in his room. This failure to support Peng pushed Mao into even stronger support for the communes, in a 'second leap' that intensified the famine.

Famine, 1958–62: how bad was it?

Accurate figures for the death toll caused by the famine are impossible to come by, which is hardly surprising, since it was only in 1980 that the government officially admitted it had occurred at all. Nevertheless, it is widely acknowledged to have been the worst famine of the 20th century, and a figure somewhere in the region of 30 million deaths is generally accepted, with the highest estimates reaching 50 million.

Although it affected urban districts, the famine was far more serious in rural areas. Tibet was by far the worst hit region in terms of the proportion of people killed, with 25 percent of its population of four million being wiped out. The government deliberately made the situation worse there by forcing the Tibetans to switch from growing barley to other crops not suited to local conditions, and by making the nomadic yak herdsmen stay in villages, rather than roaming the grasslands as they had always done. These measures made no economic sense and were intended to destroy Tibet's cultural identity, which had been under constant attack since the 1950 invasion. When the Dalai Lama's

deputy, the Panchen Lama, sent Mao a long report accusing him of attempted genocide, he was jailed.

Elsewhere, while few areas escaped the famine entirely, the worst hit provinces formed an arc across central China, from Shandong in the east (7.5 million dead), through Anhui (eight million dead), Henan, Hubei, Gansu and Sichuan (nine million dead).



Figure 2.1 The areas worst affected by the famine (in Michael Lynch, *Access to History: The People's Republic of China 1949–76 2nd edition*, 2008).

Appalling stories of suffering abound. Peasants were at the mercy of whoever distributed food in the communal canteens, and there are accounts of people reduced to eating tree bark and plants to stay alive. Husbands sold wives, and parents sold their children in return for food; prostitution and banditry, both of which had almost been stamped out earlier in the 1950s, reappeared as people sought any means to survive. There were even reports of cannibalism, as shown in Extract 3, an account from Liaoning province.

EXTRACT 3 J. Becker, *Hungry Ghosts: China's Secret Famine* (1997).

A peasant woman, unable to stand the incessant crying for food of her two-year-old daughter, and thinking perhaps to end her suffering, had strangled her. She had given the girl's body to her husband, asking him to bury it. Instead, out of his mind with hunger, he put the body in the cooking pot with what little food they had foraged. He had forced his wife to eat a bowl of the resulting stew. His wife, in a fit of remorse, had reported her husband's crime to the authorities. The fact that she came forward voluntarily made no difference. Although there was no law against cannibalism in the criminal code of the People's Republic, the Ministry of Public Security treated such cases, which were all too common, with the utmost severity. Both husband and wife were arrested and summarily executed.

Yet, while the suffering in central China went on, the state continued to requisition grain. State procurement took 17 percent of the crop in 1957, 21 percent in 1958, 28 percent in 1959 and 21 percent in 1960.

The impact that the Great Leap Forward had on agriculture in purely economic terms can be seen from the production figures shown in Source 2.

SOURCE 2 Grain and meat production, 1952–62. From Michael Lynch, *Access to History: The People's Republic of China 1949–76 2nd edition* (2008).

Year	Grain production (millions of tonnes)	Meat production (millions of tonnes)
1952	163.9	3.4
1953	166.8	3.8
1954	169.5	3.9
1955	183.9	3.3
1956	192.8	3.4
1957	195.1	4.0
1958	200.0	4.3
1959	170.0	2.6
1960	143.5	1.3
1961	147.5	1.2
1962	160.0	1.9

What caused it and why was it so bad?

China has always suffered from occasional periods of famine, when natural disasters have prevented subsistence farming from producing enough for people to survive on, but the Great Famine of 1958–62 was unprecedented in its severity. It can be attributed to five main causes, which were then compounded by the leadership's refusal to face reality at the Lushan Conference in 1959.

- By trying to develop the commune system at the same time as launching the Second Five-Year Plan for industry (see page 207) and mobilising the masses to work on engineering projects, Mao was simply being too ambitious: he was expecting too much, too soon. Peasants could not be producing food, supervising backyard furnaces and working on water conservancy projects miles from their village all at the same time, especially when the facilities of the communes were often not even in place. China's main asset may have been its vast population, but even with communes run on military lines, it was not possible to allocate manpower efficiently enough to increase food production levels. Mao was expecting peasants who had always been subsistence farmers, and were used to producing enough to satisfy the needs of their family and no more, to suddenly be able to generate huge surpluses because they now lived in communes. Some communes did produce a surplus, but the transport and communications systems were too poorly developed to move food to where it was needed. Mao seems to have had a blind faith that communes would work simply because private ownership had ended, but even he admitted in private to his physician, **Doctor Li**, that he did not know how they were supposed to work in practice.
- Mao was also deluding himself by uncritically accepting Lysenkoism and insisting that it be applied in full. Mao eagerly accepted Lysenko's claims that his 'super crops' could produce yields 16 times greater than those produced by conventional methods, even going as far as to say that: 'In company, grain grows fast; seeds are happiest when growing together.'
- Mao was always dismissive of experts, but few were on hand to offer advice anyway, because they had been purged in the anti-rightist campaign (see Chapter 1). So, at the same time as peasants were adjusting to living in communes, they were expected to embrace totally new approaches to cultivation that ran counter to the methods they had used successfully for generations.
- The impact of the overambitious nature of the plans and the reliance on pseudo-science was intensified by the climate of fear that the anti-rightist campaign generated. Cadres dared not speak out when things went wrong, and passed on to their superiors excessively optimistic reports of how much their communes were producing. These reports then encouraged the planners to

KEY PERSON

Doctor Li Zhisui (1919–95)
Mao's personal physician and confidant for over 20 years. After Mao's death, Li emigrated to the USA, where he wrote a memoir called *The Private Life of Chairman Mao*. It was warmly received in the West, but banned as prefabricated in the PRC.

set ever higher targets. When Mao went on a provincial tour of inspection, local officials were known to transplant whole fields of seedlings to line his route, to convey the impression of plenty. Anyone brave, or foolish, enough to speak out was likely to be sent to the *laogai* (labour camps, see Chapter 1), where the numbers of inmates swelled again after 1958. This combination of fear and accountability only to those above, not those below, helped to prolong the delusion that food supplies were plentiful. This also helps to account for the continued requisitioning of grain from areas that were already starving.

SOURCE 3 From Li Zhisui, *The Private Life of Chairman Mao* (1994). Here, Doctor Li gives some idea of the atmosphere of self-delusion that permeated the communes, and the anxiety of the cadres to create a good impression.

> Every commune we visited provided testimony to the abundance of the upcoming harvest. The statistics, for both grain and steel production, were astounding. 'Good news reporting stations' were being set up in communal dining halls, each station competing with nearby brigades and communes to report the highest, most extravagant figures.
>
> Mao's earlier scepticism had vanished. Common sense escaped him. He acted as though he believed the outrageous figures for agricultural production. The excitement was contagious. I was infected, too. Naturally, I could not help but wonder how rural China could be so quickly transformed.

AS Level Exam-Style Question Section A

Study Source 3 before you answer this question.

Why is Source 3 valuable to the historian for an enquiry into the reasons for the seriousness of the famine? (8 marks)

Tip

Make sure you understand the context of what Dr Li is describing, so that you can make sense of Mao's response.

- The demotivating effect on peasants of losing their own property and knowing that their reward would be minimal, no matter how hard they worked, had a negative impact on the productivity of the communes. Villagers were dispirited by losing what they regarded as their own property, and knew that the same amount of food would, or would not, be available in the communal canteen irrespective of how hard they worked. 'Like beating a drum with a cucumber' was a frequent comment that summed up the futility of working hard – 'the harder you beat, the less sound it made'.
- Finally, and underpinning all of these reasons, was Mao's own perspective of China's priorities, and his belief that the end justified the means. To him, the prospect of industrialising China rapidly and convincing the rest of the world that Chinese Communism was a success was far more important than the lives of millions of 'expendable' peasants. He had recently shocked his Russian hosts during his 1957 visit to Moscow by declaring that the death of half the Chinese population in a nuclear war would be a sacrifice worth paying for victory, and his attitude to the famine can be seen in the same light. If China was prepared to suffer any amount of sacrifice to become a world economic power, then this would only serve to underline the strength of his version of Communism. The shortfall in the population would soon be made up, he argued. This also helps explain why China continued to export food during the famine. Rice became a staple item in Communist East Germany, and their margarine industry came to depend on imported edible oils from China. Zhou Enlai even urged people in China to consume less, so that they could maintain exports and therefore show the success of the Great Leap Forward.

These reasons go a long way towards explaining why the 1958–62 famine was so serious, but the damage could have been limited if the Party leadership had responded positively to Peng's comments at the Lushan Conference of 1959. Instead of acknowledging that real problems were arising and taking measures to remedy them, by demoting Peng, the other leaders of China were officially denying the existence of a famine at all. After Lushan, grain procurement targets were increased and exports to other countries continued, in order to make the outside world think that the Great Leap Forward was working. Local problems were blamed on peasants hoarding food, and squads of Party thugs were dispatched into the countryside to find such 'hoarders' and send them to the *laogai*. The great chance to limit the damage had been missed, and millions more people died as a result.

While the above political factors undoubtedly made the situation much worse, adverse weather also played a part. In 1960, the worst drought in more than a century was followed by severe flooding across much of central China. The question is often asked, therefore: was the famine the result of policies introduced under the Great Leap Forward, or was it an unavoidable natural disaster similar to those of earlier decades? Extracts 4 and 5 approach the famine from very different perspectives.

EXTRACT 4 From Jung Chang and Jon Halliday, *Mao: The Unknown Story* (2012).

Close to 38 million people died of starvation and overwork in the Great Leap Forward and famine, which lasted four years. This was the greatest famine of the twentieth century – and of all recorded human history. Mao knowingly starved and worked these tens of millions of people to death. During the two critical years 1958–59, grain exports alone, almost exactly seven million tons, would have provided the equivalent of over 840 calories per day for 38 million people – the difference between life and death. And this was only grain; it does not include the meat, cooking oil, eggs and other foodstuffs that were exported in very large quantities. Had this food not been exported (and instead distributed according to humane criteria), very probably not a single person in China would have had to die of hunger.

EXTRACT 5 From E.L. Wheelwright and Bruce McFarlane, *The Chinese Road to Socialism* (1973). Wheelwright was a Marxist who taught economics at Sydney University for over 30 years, where McFarlane studied under him.

In agriculture, 1958 was certainly a good year, though not as good as had been thought. The three succeeding years were extremely bad. In 1959, almost half the cultivated area was affected by heavy floods or serious drought. In 1960, drought, typhoons, floods and pests struck 55 million hectares, more than half of the cultivated area, and seriously affected another 2 to 24 million hectares, some of which bore no crop at all. The Yellow River practically dried up for a month in Shandong, an almost unheard of event. A serious food shortage developed, but famine was avoided by rationing and collective effort. The commune system, by its ability to mobilise large numbers of people, undoubtedly helped in avoiding famine in these difficult years.

AS Level Exam-Style Question Section B

To what extent was the famine of 1958–62 caused by the government's policies? (20 marks)

Tip

You need to identify and explain the results of the policies that directly caused the famine, but also explain other contributory factors that were not directly the result of government policy.

The restoration of private farming by Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping

As more reports of high provincial death tolls filtered up to the leadership, even Mao became more receptive to modifying his approach. In order to shift the blame onto subversive local officials (whom he accused of being counter-revolutionaries), rather than admitting any personal responsibility, a campaign was launched to overthrow the management of communes and root out corrupt elements. This was followed by an emergency directive, in November 1960, that allowed villagers to keep their private plots of land and to engage in side occupations as well as farming, and restored local markets. This marked a turning point in the famine. It depended how far local leaders were prepared to go, but the commune system could now be dismantled if they chose to do so.

The initial architect of this strategic retreat was the economic planner, **Li Fuchun**, who, unlike Peng, managed to present grim facts to Mao without incurring his wrath. Li told the party that Mao's directives were entirely correct, but they, the leaders, had collectively made mistakes in carrying them out. In 1962, Mao called on President Liu Shaoqi and CCP general secretary Deng Xiaoping to take responsibility for restoring food production levels and ending the chaos in the countryside. They encouraged local officials to make full use of the 1960 directive.

KEY PERSON

Li Fuchun (1899–1975)
A senior economic planner, and Liu's deputy as Chairman of the PRC. He survived the early stages of the Cultural Revolution, but was then demoted.

Subsequently, many communes broke up into smaller collectives of about 30 households, where villagers were rewarded according to their individual input, as in the earlier days of the co-operatives, while some reverted entirely to private farming. To reduce the pressure on urban food supplies, 25 million city-dwellers were forced to move to the countryside, a feat that Mao likened to deporting the population of a country the size of Belgium. In 1961, massive grain imports were arranged from Canada, Australia and even the USA, until, by 1965, the yield of the Chinese grain harvest was back up to its level of 1957, before the Great Leap had been launched. Imports, however, remained at a high level until the 1970s.

The replacement of ideological fanaticism by economic realism was illustrated by Deng's comment to the Communist Youth League in July 1962, that 'whether white or black, a cat is a good cat so long as it catches a rat'.

Although Deng and Liu had supervised a recovery from the disaster of the Great Leap Forward, Mao was unhappy that people had rejected the communes, and uneasy that the reversion to capitalist practices was undermining the values on which his reputation was based. Also, he suspected that

Liu and Deng were using the popularity that the recovery was earning them to prepare a plot against him from within the Party. Both were to pay for this during the Cultural Revolution.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

The Great Famine

Take each of the five overarching reasons for the famine in turn: the over-ambitious nature of the Great Leap Forward, Lysenkoism, the climate of fear, the demotivation of the peasant workforce and Mao's belief that the end justified the means.

1 For each, in no more than 50 words, explain why it caused the famine.

2 Put the five in rank order of importance, justifying your first and last choices.

3 Explain the reasons why you think that Peng got no support at Lushan.

THINKING HISTORICALLY Interpretations (5c)

Good questions/bad questions

Below are descriptions of three eyewitnesses to the Great Famine.

Peng Dehuai	**Francois Mitterrand**	**Dr Li Zhisui**
Defence Minister since 1954, with a proud revolutionary record as a Red Army leader going back to the 1930s. He had a reputation for straight talking and had never been afraid to present his views to Mao, whom he considered to be a close ally. Already dubious about the accuracy of the high harvest figures being reported, Peng had seen first-hand the extent of suffering in his home province.	A leading left-wing politician, later to become President of France. When he visited China in 1960 to see communism in action, he was given a stage-managed tour to show off Mao's economic achievements. This convinced him that the Great Leap Forward was an outstanding success and there was no famine.	Mao's personal physician and confidant. He accompanied Mao on fact-finding tours round the countryside, so saw the same things as Mao and recorded Mao's reaction to them. His role was primarily medical not political, although Mao respected his opinions and advice.

1 Devise three criteria of what makes a good historical question.

2 Consider what you know about the causes and extent of the Great Famine.

a) Each write a historical question based on the Famine.

b) Put these in rank order, with the best question first, based on your criteria.

3 Using a piece of A3 paper, write the names of the three eyewitnesses so they form a large triangle.

a) Write your questions from 2a on the piece of paper so that their positions reflect how likely the eyewitnesses are to be interested by that question. For example, a question about levels of grain requisitioning from the communes would interest Peng and Mitterrand, but not Li, so would be placed somewhere near them but nowhere near Li on the diagram.

b) Add some further questions. Try to think of questions that only one of the three would be interested in.

4 Take it in turns to try to answer the questions you have created in the style of one of the eyewitnesses. See if the other members of the group can guess which one it is.

Answer the following questions individually using the examples created by the above activity.

5 Does one method of constructing history lead to better reasoning than the others? Explain your answer.

6 Explain why all historians who deploy rigorous methodology are, to an extent, useful sources for the study of the past.

HOW SUCCESSFUL WAS THE FIRST FIVE-YEAR PLAN, 1952–56?

Why it was not immediately introduced

Although Mao regarded the establishment of a much stronger industrial base as vital if China was to develop as a world power, no major economic plan could be launched until more immediate problems had been solved. First, the Communists had to consolidate their political control by mopping up the remnants of Nationalist opposition and conquering the outlying provinces. Second, they had to reduce the annual inflation rate from the staggering 1,000 percent that they inherited. It was also necessary to reward the peasants for their support by arranging for land redistribution to take place as soon as possible, so this took priority. Further delay in detailed planning was also caused by the high level of military spending and the disruption caused by participation in the Korean War from October 1950.

The USSR's financial and technical support

Why they used the Soviet model

By 1951, the annual inflation rate had been cut to a manageable 15 percent, by a combination of cuts to public spending, increases in taxation and the replacement of the old Chinese dollar with the yuan (or renminbi). The first of what Mao envisaged would be three Five-Year Plans was launched the following year. It was based on the Soviet model. Despite the difficulties of the relationship between the CCP and the Russian Communist Party over the previous 25 years, Soviet Russia was still, at this stage, an inspiration to the Chinese Communists, and Mao had made it clear in 1949 that he would 'lean to one side', by aligning China with Russia rather than looking towards the West for help. Also, despite its problems, the centrally planned Soviet system had enabled Stalin to defeat Nazi Germany, so it was regarded as the best, albeit only, available option for China to copy. Mao's task in introducing a centrally planned economy was made easier by the fact that there had been some degree of state involvement in Chinese industry since imperial times, and this had accelerated under Chiang Kai-shek, who had established a National Resources Committee (NRC) to control industrial investment and encourage migration from the countryside to the cities. Mao was able to take advantage of the expertise of the managers of the NRC, many of whom remained after the fall of the GMD.

The nature of Soviet help

A vital part of the Sino-Soviet Treaty of 1950 was the arrangement for Soviet advisers to come to China and teach them how to run a Communist state. Over 10,000 civilian technicians brought their specialist knowledge of civil engineering, industry, governmental organisation and higher education. Their expertise came at a cost, however: their high salaries were paid by the Chinese, and they were housed, at China's expense, in closely guarded compounds outside the main cities, in an odd throwback to the situation in imperial times, when **European concessions** had enjoyed similar special privileges. Russia also agreed to lend China $300 million, as security for which the Chinese had to hand over a large part of their bullion stocks. Furthermore, the credit was not a gift: the loans were to be repaid with interest. Chinese delegations also visited Moscow, particularly to be trained in propaganda techniques and in aspects of governmental organisation.

KEY TERM

European concessions
Areas in 19th-century China where the European powers were allowed to run affairs their own way, beyond Chinese jurisdiction.

The influence of the Soviet Union soon became clear to see in the cities, where critics complained that classical Chinese buildings were being cleared to make way for new office blocks and construction projects built in 'Soviet brutalist' style. Russian ideas also penetrated education, where Russian was the only foreign language taught in schools, and the lunch hour was pushed back to three in the afternoon, to copy the Russian practice of having six consecutive morning classes. TASS, the official Soviet news agency, became the main source from which the Chinese newspapers gathered their information. 'The Soviet Union's today is our tomorrow' soon became a slogan familiar to all in the cities.

While Soviet influence may have made more visual impact in urban areas, it also exerted a profound influence on the lives of those in the rural communes through the adoption of Lysenkoism.

The plan's targets

The overall aim was to make the PRC as self-sufficient in food and manufactured goods as possible, in order to protect China in a potentially hostile capitalist world. Although detailed plans for each industry could not be finalised until the Korean War was over, the principles were already in place by 1952. Targets would be set from above by economic planners, rather than in response to consumer demand, and heavy industry (iron and steel, transport and communications, energy supply, industrial machinery and chemicals) would come first. In addition, several spectacular public works projects, like new bridges across the Yangtze at Nanjing, were added for their propaganda value. The basic ideas were given a preliminary dry-run in Manchuria, where heavy industry was already well established, before being applied to the entire nation. The targets for specific industries can be seen in Source 4.

The aim was also to channel resources into these heavy industries, away from consumer goods, which were regarded as less important. Also, it was hoped that people would be more willing to invest in patriotic savings schemes, which the government could then direct into industrial investment, if there were few consumer goods to tempt them into spending on alternatives. By forcing the collective farms to sell food at low prices to the government, it was hoped to keep industrial workers' wages low, because cheap food would be readily available in the urban areas.

Initially, not all industries were nationalised – only those belonging to foreigners and those in the banking, gas, electricity and transport sectors of the economy were taken under state control in 1949. However, the fear generated by the 'five antis' campaign (see Chapter 1) made it possible, in early 1956, to bring an end to

private ownership entirely. For business owners, it was easier to accept compensation from the state for their enterprises than to run the risk of being denounced as 'rightists' and suffer the inevitable punishment that would have incurred.

As well as by food requisitioning from the APCs and patriotic savings schemes, the plan was to be financed by higher levels of taxation in the cities and loans from the USSR.

Successes and failures of the plan

SOURCE 4 Production of key items during the First Five-Year Plan, 1952–57. From Robert Whitfield, *The Impact of Chairman Mao 1946–76* (2nd edition) (2008).

Industrial sector	1952 (actual)	1957 (target)	1957 (actual)	1957 (actual as percentage of target)
Coal (millions of tonnes)	68.50	113	130	115.00
Steel (millions of tonnes)	1.35	4.12	5.35	129.80
Cement (millions of tonnes)	2.86	6	6.86	114.30
Electrical power (millions of kWh)	7.26	15.90	19.34	121.60
Locomotives	20	200	167	83.50
Trucks	0	4,000	7,500	187.50
Insecticide (tonnes)	600	70,000	61,000	87.10
Machine tools	13,374	12,720	28,000	220.10
Bicycles (thousands)	80	555	1,174	211.50

According to the official statistics, most sectors of the economy succeeded in reaching their targets. The annual growth rate was about nine percent per year during the plan, a figure that compared favourably with the Russian experience in the 1930s, particularly when it is remembered that the war in Korea disrupted long-term planning early on. Urban living standards improved in terms of wages and job security, though at the expense of a loss of freedom to change jobs or travel. More people were migrating to the cities, where the population grew from 57 million in 1949 to 100 million by 1957.

However, despite the overall success of the plan, the figures are unlikely to be completely reliable, because officials had an obvious vested interest in exaggerating levels of production in order to please their superiors, in the same way, although not to the same extent, as cadres in the communes covered up the true state of affairs. The emphasis on reaching targets also inevitably put the emphasis on quantity over quality.

There were also other negative aspects to the plan. While Soviet guidance was invaluable, it exposed shortcomings in the skill and literacy levels of Chinese workers that would only improve when the education system was updated. However, by the time the plan ended, less than half the children under 16 were in full-time education, so this was a long way from happening. At a managerial level, many of the economic planners who worked for the Nationalists had remained in place after 1949, but by the time the plan began, the 'anti' campaigns of 1951–52 had driven out many of them, and the standard of bureaucratic administration suffered as a result. Finally, there was competition for resources between private and state-owned enterprises (SOEs), which was not resolved until the ending of private ownership in 1956.

In the countryside, the plan had more negative than positive influences. Here, the peasants in the communes were going short of food because it was being exported to Russia to pay for the Soviet advice, and sold cheaply to the cities to feed the urban workers. It was an ironic twist that Lysenkoism, which formed part of the Soviet advice that they were paying for, was actually making peasants' lives much worse.

SOURCE 5

From an article in *China Pictorial*, published in April 1958. This was a weekly magazine that was first published in 1950. Calligraphy for the title was done by Mao himself, and it was one of the few publications allowed to continue during the Cultural Revolution.

Last December (1957) Liu Shaoqi issued a call for China to catch up or surpass Britain in output of iron and steel within fifteen years. It should be remembered that China's first five year plan began in 1953, nearly two hundred years after the industrial revolution in Britain. But the Chinese people have displayed amazing ability in building up their country.

In the first plan, the targets for total output value of industrial and agricultural production were over-fulfilled. The output of steel increased on average by 31.2% a year... there was a new and large factory or mine coming into operation every two days.

Inspired by the success of the first five year plan, the Chinese people are launching a new nationwide upsurge in industrial and agricultural production. China's second five year plan is even more awe inspiring than her first. In 1962, when the plan will be completed, the yearly output of steel will reach twelve million tons.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

The First Five-Year Plan, 1952–56

1 Draw up a balance sheet to show the successful and unsuccessful aspects of the First Five-Year Plan.

2 Using the above list, decide which aspects were successful or otherwise from the point of view of each of the following: the Chinese economy; the urban population; the rural population; Mao.

WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE SECOND FIVE-YEAR PLAN, 1958–62?

The Second Five-Year Plan formed part of the Great Leap Forward, which was announced at the Eighth CCP Congress in May 1958. While agriculture was to be modernised by the development of the People's Communes, ambitious new targets for industrial growth were to be pursued at the same time. Mao called this 'the Great Leap' because he was impatient at the relatively slow pace of economic progress made so far. He now wanted China to become a modern industrial power without bothering to go through the normal phases of development that other leading powers had experienced.

In February, the responsibility for economic planning had been moved from the state to the Party, which partly explains why this Five-Year Plan was not a 'plan' in the strict sense of the word. It did not involve planners announcing carefully thought-out targets that specific industrial sectors were supposed to reach by a certain time. Instead, the organisational details were often left to the initiative of local cadres, and direction from above came in the form of slogans urging people on to greater efforts, mixed with threats against those who did not pull their weight. Targets were constantly being revised upwards, sometimes by Mao himself, sometimes from below, by keen officials trying to create a good impression.

Mao's reasons for launching it

Although the decision to launch the Great Leap Forward can be explained by a combination of reasons – economic, political, personal and ideological – in the final analysis, it was political considerations that were paramount.

On an economic level, industrialisation depended on agriculture becoming more productive and efficient in order to feed the industrial workforce. This would free up peasants, who would migrate to the cities to become urban workers themselves. The speed with which farming had been collectivised and the encouraging early signs from the new People's Communes seemed to indicate that agriculture was progressing sufficiently rapidly by 1958 to encourage Mao to accelerate the demands on industry. However, it was not as simple as that, because there was still a vigorous debate going on between conservatives and radicals in the Party. Conservatives, like Zhou Enlai and **Chen Yun**, advocated a 'carrot' approach of rewarding high food producers with material incentives (in the form of more consumer goods and higher food prices), while radical hardliners called for punitive measures against low producers and the requisitioning of food (the 'stick'). Mao initially considered this latter approach too risky, given that 70 percent of Party members were peasants. Yet the problem with the cautious approach was that industry was not yet producing large amounts of consumer goods to offer the peasants, and the state simply could not afford to pay generous prices for the food. It would therefore be wrong to see the launch of the Great Leap as purely the result of rational economic logic, because the arguments about the best way forward had not yet been won.

KEY PERSON

Chen Yun (1905–95)
A long-time Politburo member with significant influence over economic planning. Partly because he had been trained in Russia, he retained a strong preference for centralised control over the economy. He later helped draw up the Third Five-Year Pan, which restored central control.

More important were personal and political factors. On a personal level, Mao's confidence was at a high: collectivisation had been achieved more rapidly than expected, there had been an impressive burst of activity on water conservancy schemes during the winter of 1957–58, and his provincial tour of early 1958 had been enthusiastically received. Anxious to prove their credentials against the backdrop of the latest anti-rightist campaign, local cadres were eager to demonstrate the revolutionary fervour of the peasants in their locality, all of which helped to convince Mao that more ambitious schemes would be possible.

On a political level, Mao had just returned from Moscow determined to show the Soviet Union that he could act independently of them. By moving from socialism to communism along the 'Chinese road', rather than following the Russian model, Mao hoped to demonstrate his credentials as the next leader of the communist world. The Great Leap Forward, with its commitment to developing industry and agriculture simultaneously, while also mobilising the peasantry en masse on construction projects, would do just that.

Ideologically, the plan's reliance on mass peasant mobilisation fitted in with Mao's thinking, and the greater degree of decentralisation, compared to the first plan, gave more scope for local initiative to thrive, which also satisfied Mao's ideological preferences.

EXTEND YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Mao's second visit to Moscow (1957)

Mao's second visit to Moscow had been to attend the 40th anniversary celebrations of the 1917 Revolution, but he had not been impressed with Khrushchev ever since his so-called 'secret speech' of 1956 (which had criticised Stalinism), and he was unhappy that Russia's attempts to establish better relations with the West threatened to betray the global interests of communism. This visit was the occasion when he shocked his hosts by declaring that the loss of half of China's population in a successful nuclear war would be a price worth paying.

How the plan worked

Decentralisation

While the central government remained very much in control in China, a key change from the First Five-Year Plan was the move to decentralise economic activity. The idea of this was to give more freedom to local Party officials, the cadres, to harness the energies of the masses, who Mao regarded as China's greatest single asset. Mao had become convinced that if state bureaucrats continued to control planning, it would merely hold back the pace of change. If China was to advance at the required speed, it would need the cadres to unleash the potential of the millions of peasants and workers who he believed were eager to participate in transforming the country.

Backyard furnaces

Nowhere was this change more evident than in the campaign to launch backyard furnaces to produce steel.

The chief method by which industry was to 'leap forward' was by the production of as much steel as possible, wherever possible. Mao had already announced in the autumn of 1957 that steel production would quadruple inside the next four years, to reach 20 million tonnes per annum, a figure he proceeded to double as soon as he got back from Moscow at the end of the year.

The steel target for 1958 was raised from six to eight million tonnes at the Party Congress in May, and then again to 10.7 million tonnes in September. Once it became clear that these targets could not be met by the existing conventional steel plants, Mao ordered the launch of the backyard furnace campaign.

Buoyed up by the apparent success of the water conservancy campaign of the previous winter, in which 100 million peasants had been involved in digging reservoirs and canals with minimal equipment, Mao hit on the idea of increasing steel production in a similar fashion. Every family was urged to construct their own backyard furnace and melt down their metal objects to produce 'steel'.

The response was spectacular and it became a national movement immediately. In practically every town and village, people got involved, to such an extent that the night sky was turned red by the fires of so many improvised kilns, and by day smoke blotted out the sun. In September 1958, 14 percent of China's steel came from local furnaces, but by October it was 49 percent and, at its peak, it is reckoned that a quarter of the population had abandoned their normal activities in order to take part.

SOURCE 6 The backyard furnaces could be built quickly, with little expertise, but they produced pig iron, not steel. Khrushchev mockingly referred to them as 'samovar kilns': Russians brew tea in samovars.



This, of course, put an unsustainable strain on food production, and it proved necessary to close schools and deploy peasant shock brigades, made up of anyone available, in order to get in the harvest. At this stage, the end of 1958, the leadership still thought that the harvest would be unbelievably good, and were deluding themselves that the steel being produced would be of usable quality.

It was not until the spring of 1959 that it became apparent to the leadership that the only decent steel being produced was in the large smelting plants, and that the home-made variety was useless. The backyard furnace campaign was cut back, but not abandoned, for fear of losing face, so peasants continued to melt down their pots, pans and other metal household objects into worthless 'steel', which was taken away by the authorities and buried out of sight. Not only was the campaign economically damaging in deploying people on futile activity to the detriment of producing food, it also had negative ecological consequences, since it led to the destruction of vast swathes of woodland to supply fuel for the furnaces. This, in turn, led to faster soil erosion and worse flooding, thereby increasing the need for water conservancy schemes.

SOURCE 7

From Sirin Phathanothai, *The Dragon's Pearl – Growing Up Among Mao's Reclusive Circle* (1994). Sirin Phathanothai was about ten when the events she describes below occurred. She and her ten-year-old brother were children of a leading Thai politician, who had sent them to stay with Zhou Enlai as part of an initiative to improve relations between China and Thailand. Later, she got in trouble during the Cultural Revolution because of her privileged background, but her fortunes turned around again when she rescued some children from a fire and then became something of a heroine. The account below was written after those events.

My school alone had three furnaces. The students dug a big hole in the ground. The displaced soil was then carefully sieved and the hole re-filled with it. Spoons were used to hollow it out, leaving two holes to the surface. An electric blower was placed at one hole and wood fed into the furnace through the other. When the fire began to roar, we tossed in the scrap iron and broken pots and pans we had collected. Tests were solemnly performed and our product was duly declared to be crude steel.

One day I spirited away a lump of our product and proudly carried it over to Zhou. His ready smile quickly disappeared when he saw what I'd brought.

'Don't you like me joining in the steel campaign?' I asked. He asked me to tell him exactly how the steel was made, how we had built the furnace and what else was going on at school. He listened intently, although my excitement was rapidly diminishing as I sensed his displeasure.

'I want you to remember to study your lessons. The children should get back to school. It is wrong for them to be pulled away from their classes like this.'

AS Level Exam-Style Question Section A

Study Source 7 before you answer this question.

How much weight do you give the evidence in Source 7 for an enquiry into the backyard furnace scheme?

Explain your answer using the source, the information given about it and your own knowledge of the historical context. (12 marks)

Tip

Look carefully at the full title of her book as well as the other information about the author when weighing up the source's value and limitations.

SOURCE 8

Li Zhisui, *The Private Life of Chairman Mao* (1994). Doctor Li was Mao's personal physician from 1954 until 1976. He accompanied Mao on many tours round the provinces and was a close confidant. He wrote his memoirs after emigrating to the USA in the 1980s. The account here is from 1958.

Zeng Xisheng (first party secretary in Anhui) was courting Mao's favour. He wanted the Chairman to visit Anhui province. We took a boat down the Yangtze and were then escorted to the capital, Hefei. There we witnessed new miracles. Backyard steel furnaces were the local speciality.

I saw the first such furnace – a make-shift brick and mortar affair, four or five metres high – in the courtyard of the offices of the Anhui provincial party committee. I was astounded. The furnace was taking basic household implements and transforming them into nuggets called steel, melting down knives into ingots that could be used to make other knives. I had no idea whether the ingots were of good quality steel, but it did seem ridiculous to melt steel to produce steel, to destroy knives to make knives. The backyard furnaces were everywhere in Anhui, all producing the same rough looking ingots.

Even now I don't know where the idea of the backyard steel furnaces originated, but the logic was clear: why spend millions of dollars building modern steel plants when steel could be produced for almost nothing in courtyards and fields? The 'indigenous' or 'backyard' steel furnaces were the result.

A Level Exam-Style Question Section A

Study Sources 7 and 8 before you answer this question.

How far could the historian make use of Sources 7 and 8 together to investigate the failure of the drive to produce more steel than Britain in the period 1958–62?

Explain your answer using both sources, the information given about them and your own knowledge of the historical context. (20 marks)

Tip

There is plenty of useful content in the sources themselves, but make sure you also bring in wider contextual knowledge of other reasons for the failure, such as the nature of the target itself and relevant details of the Second Five-Year Plan.

State-owned enterprises

Another key element to the Second Five-Year Plan was the consolidation of the earlier move towards state ownership of businesses. Those enterprises that had remained initially in private

hands after the Communist takeover in 1949 had been nationalised early in 1956, and were now known as state-owned enterprises (SOEs). Prices, output targets and wages were set by the state, and there was no longer any bargaining for better conditions between employers and workers. While workers enjoyed guaranteed jobs and wages (the so-called 'iron rice bowl'), as well as certain medical and educational benefits, the system as a whole was inefficient because it removed incentives to work harder. In a similar situation to that in the People's Communes, state control brought demotivation: whether the SOE was efficiently run or not did not matter to workers or management, since any surplus went straight to the state.

Construction projects

SOURCE 9 Propaganda photograph of Mao shifting earth at the Ming Tombs Reservoir in May 1958. Mao insisted that his entourage also put in a shift of digging in a stage-managed display of solidarity with the workers. This is the original photo, which includes Peng Zhen (see Chapter 3) alongside Mao, but he was airbrushed out of later versions after his fall from grace in the Cultural Revolution.



The term 'Great Leap Forward' was first used to describe the water conservancy projects that were launched in late 1957, and which involved millions of peasant workers by the end of that year. Mao saw the masses as China's main asset, and argued that sheer numbers could achieve the desired result without needing access to advanced machinery. In much the same way that the old emperors had built the Great Wall, work brigades were sent out from the communes to construct dams and reservoirs using only the most rudimentary equipment – shovels, baskets and carrying poles.

Some of the new irrigation schemes were total disasters because they were not thought through properly beforehand. The Three Gate Gorge Dam, designed to control the flow of the Yellow River and reduce the damage caused by silt deposits, was perhaps the most ambitious, but within a year it was being rebuilt. By 1961, twice as much mud was being deposited downstream, and foreign visitors were banned from going near the dam. All over China, hundreds of smaller projects were instigated, and although some were relatively successful, the cost in terms of lives lost and labour taken away from farming was colossal. In many areas, the disruption of existing drainage patterns caused by building new irrigation systems led to an increase in **salinisation**, which reduced the productivity of the land.

Flood control and irrigation schemes to ease drought needed serious attention if Chinese agriculture was to become more productive, so the water conservancy schemes made theoretical sense. However, the same cannot be said of the methods used to carry them out: expert advice (which the Soviet specialists offered) was welcomed when it speeded things up, but technical issues that threatened to cause delays were normally brushed aside. Mao's response when doubts arose about the design of the Three Gate Gorge Dam was to write an editorial in the *People's Daily* newspaper, entitled 'What is this trash?' His main criterion for judging the success of a project was the cubic tonnage of soil that had been shifted, which helped to stimulate competition between provinces, but was hardly a true reflection of a project's worth.

KEY TERM

Salinisation
Excessive build-up of salt in the soil, which reduces its fertility.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

Construction projects

1 Explain two reasons why construction projects were tackled using minimal amounts of mechanisation.

2 Explain two reasons why Mao was so keen on mass mobilisation as a technique.

3 Explain two ways in which mass mobilisation was counterproductive to economic progress.

4 Why do you think people embraced the backyard furnace scheme with so much enthusiasm?

5 Why do you think the authorities did not simply close down the backyard furnaces when it became apparent that the quality of metal produced was unusable?

Successes and failures of the Second Five-Year Plan

SOURCE 10 Production of key goods during the Second Five-Year Plan and beyond, 1957–64. From Michael Lynch, *Access to History: The People's Republic of China 1949–76 2nd edition* (2008).

Product	1957	1958	1959	1960	1961	1962	1963	1964
Coal (millions of tonnes)	131	230	290	270	180	180	190	200
Steel (millions of tonnes)	5.4	8	10	13	8	8	9	10
Oil (millions of barrels)	1.5	2.3	3.7	4.5	4.5	5.3	5.9	7
Chemical fertilisers (millions of tonnes)	0.8	1.4	2	2.5	1.4	2.1	3	3.6
Cotton cloth (billions of metres)	5	5.7	7.5	6	3	3	3.5	4

KEY TERMS

Sino-Soviet split
This had been brewing for several years and finally came to a head in 1961, when, in a stage-managed but dramatic gesture, Zhou Enlai led his delegation out of a conference in Moscow. He was expressing China's support for the Albanians, who Khrushchev was abusing for failing to follow Moscow's orders, and who China backed for exactly the same reason.

Tiananmen Square
The reconstruction of Tiananmen Square was an enormous project that involved clearing away the existing buildings and replacing them with a vast, paved space, left open to the south but enclosed by new buildings to the east and west, and the old Forbidden City (see Chapter 3) to the north. Mao insisted it be made bigger than Red Square in Moscow.

The statistics in Source 10 show some increases in the output of raw materials, but in terms of producing manufactured goods, the plan failed alarmingly. By 1962, China was only producing half the amount of heavy industrial goods and three-quarters the amount of light industrial goods that were being made in 1958, at the start of the plan. Soviet experts had provided much-needed guidance during the First Five-Year Plan, but Khrushchev withdrew them all together in 1960, when the **Sino-Soviet split** worsened.

Lack of clear planning lay at the heart of the plan's failure. Mao made no secret of his own lack of scientific and technical knowledge. He relied on intuition and assumed that the massive deployment of manpower was an adequate substitute for informed planning and direction from above. While there were some eye-catching successes, notably the construction of **Tiananmen Square** in Beijing, and, in 1964, the development of nuclear weapons, the main picture was of haphazard development in which the basics were often neglected.

China continued to lack the necessary levels of technical and managerial know-how to move forward at the speed the leadership wanted, but it cut corners to fulfil targets on time. Quality control was particularly inadequate, and this caused major problems with export orders, which frequently had to be replaced when complaints about substandard goods threatened to ruin China's reputation as a trading partner.

The Lushan Conference, July 1959

The Party gathering at Lushan was officially called by Mao to assess the progress of the Great Leap Forward as it reached the end of its first year. However, he was clearly expecting trouble, and had brought along his wife, Jiang Qing, whose influence over the Shanghai wing of the Party might prove useful. In the event, her support was not needed, because only Peng Dehuai stood up to Mao, and he became isolated as a troublemaker when other leaders failed to endorse his revelations of the famine.

The conference had important consequences at both economic and political levels. As far as the economy was concerned, it meant the Great Leap Forward would continue apace. Before Lushan, there had been signs that Mao was considering moderating aspects of the Second Five-Year Plan – for example, by reining in the development of the backyard furnaces – but afterwards, China embarked on what is called 'the second leap' and the agricultural policies, in particular, pushed on at full speed.

Politically, too, the conference was significant. Whereas beforehand it was assumed that any leading Party comrade could express their views freely at a Party conference, it had now become clear that the only person who could criticise Mao was Mao himself. Party leaders were much more guarded about their views in future, and Mao was able to become even more dictatorial in his approach.

ACTIVITY
WRITING

Expanding vocabulary

Use the words below to fill in the gaps in the passage.

hierarchy; insinuated; critique; cumulative; orchestrated; collectively; counterproductive; convened; endorsing; delegates; retribution; counter-revolutionary; outspoken; gauntlet; compounded; shortcomings; customary.

In a similar vein to the way in which he had ..... the Hundred Flowers campaign, in early 1959 Mao urged Party officials to express their views of the progress of the Great Leap Forward openly, without fear of ..... if they made criticisms.

It was in order to discuss their views that the Central Committee ..... at Lushan in July that year. In his ..... fashion, Peng Dehuai was ....., declaring that the Party ..... should be held ..... responsible for the plan's ..... as well as its successes. To Mao the ..... effect of Peng's verbal observations added up to too much criticism. Peng ..... his mistake by writing to Mao, who distributed copies of his letter to other ..... When Mao addressed them, he ..... that such negative comments about the communes were ..... and would be ..... Mao threw down the ..... to the assembly, challenging the attendees to choose between ..... Peng's ..... or Mao himself.

Liu Shaoqi, Deng Xiaoping and economic reform, 1962–65 (the Third Five-Year Plan)

The retreat from the Great Leap Forward, which had begun in late 1960, speeded up in 1962, when Liu and Deng were put in charge. As well as allowing the communes to be broken up, they also closed down thousands of inefficient projects that had been set up in the Great Leap and announced more realistic coal and steel targets. To help with this, there was a relaxation of the persecution of scientists and intellectuals, previously attacked as 'rightists', but whose contribution was now regarded as desirable.

Much of this more pragmatic approach to economic planning came from Chen Yun, who was mainly responsible for drawing up the Third Five-Year Plan in 1962.

The third plan marked a decisive shift back to centralised control, with production targets being reviewed annually and made more realistic. Experts were back in favour and financial incentives were restored to encourage workers to greater efforts. The results were positive across all sectors of the economy: agricultural production recovered to 1957 levels, oil and natural gas production rocketed, and manufactured goods were produced in much greater quantities.

It was during this period (1964) that Chinese scientists succeeded in exploding China's own atom bomb, having pieced together the documents that the Soviet advisers had hurriedly shredded when they were withdrawn in 1959. Mao was jubilant, and contemptuously 'thanked' Khrushchev for 'helping' the Chinese to develop nuclear weapons independently by withdrawing.

Although Mao welcomed the economic improvements of the early 1960s, he was reluctant to attribute them to the retreat from the Great Leap Forward, which he described as dangerous **revisionism**.

KEY TERM

Revisionism
A term of criticism used by Communists to describe any course of action that they felt betrayed communist principles. Mao frequently used it against his enemies, notably Khrushchev.

In an attempt to prevent any further drift away from strict communist principles, Mao had summoned a conference of 7,000 cadres in January 1962. However, the result had not been as he had hoped, because Liu Shaoqi, while praising Mao for his correct leadership, had gone on to imply that Mao should share some of the blame with the other leaders at the centre of government for China's past mistakes. After Lushan, this was a risky tone to take, but Liu knew he had the approval of the conference and Mao accepted responsibility as chairman of the Party, though he stopped short of admitting any personal mistakes. This was significant, because it was the first time that Mao's aura of infallibility had been damaged, and for the next few months, he withdrew from public life, leaving Liu, Deng and Zhou in charge.

A clear difference of views over how the economy should be run was now becoming apparent. On the right of the Party were Liu, Deng and Chen Yun, who took the pragmatic view that ideological concessions would be necessary to restore the economy: mass mobilisation was no substitute for expertise and planning, and private trade was justified if it motivated people to work harder. On the left, Mao was arguing that continuing revolution should be the key: without mass mobilisation, there would always be the danger of a new bourgeoisie emerging inside the Party and destroying the gains of the revolution. Mao returned to the political fray in the summer of 1962 at the annual Party conference, where he went on the attack, demanding to know whether China was going to take 'the socialist road or the capitalist road', and condemning the revisionism of Liu and Deng. The result was an uneasy compromise, whereby Liu and Deng outwardly agreed with Mao's analysis of the situation, while continuing to do things their own way. They criticised rural capitalism, but did nothing to stop farmers owning their own private plots and selling their produce for profit.

Liu and Deng's pragmatic economic approach continued for the time being, but a political power struggle inside the Party was building up, which would explode in the Cultural Revolution from 1966.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

Differences between the Five-Year Plans

1 Create a table showing the aims, methods and results of the three Five-Year Plans, to illustrate the key similarities and differences between them.

2 Identify and then explain two differences between the first and second plans.

3 Identify and then explain two differences between the second and third plans.

THINKING HISTORICALLY

Cause and consequence (6b)

Attitudes and actions

Individuals can only make choices based on their context. Prevalent attitudes combine with individual experience and natural temperament to frame the individual's perception of what is going on around them. Nobody can know the future or see into the minds of others.

Action	Context
At the CCP Central Committee meeting, held at Wuhan in December 1958, Mao announced that he was stepping down as Chairman of the PRC. He handed over the responsibilities of this post to Liu Shaoqi.	Mao had claimed for some time that he was becoming increasingly unhappy with the formal duties that went with the chairmanship of the country and wanted more time to devote himself to ideological matters. Mao stayed on in his role as chairman of the CCP. At the same meeting, Mao announced a record harvest for that year of 430 million tonnes of grain, a figure that stretched the credulity of the Central Committee, which scaled it down before announcing it. The Great Leap Forward had been announced in May 1958, which involved meeting ambitious industrial production targets and making rapid progress towards establishing the People's Communes. During 1958, Mao had been on two tours of the provinces, to see for himself how the communes were working. In July 1959, a special conference was called at Lushan to discuss the progress of the Great Leap Forward.

Answer the following questions individually, and then discuss your answers in a group:

1 Why did Mao decide to step down at this particular point in time?

2 Why did he step down from that particular role?

3 Apart from the reason given above, what other reasons explain his decision?

4 What evidence can you find from subsequent developments that his decision to step down succeeded, or caused him problems?

5 How far should the historian try to understand the context of the beliefs and values of people in the past when explaining why individuals make choices in history?

A Level Exam-Style Question Section B

How accurate is it to state that, as far as industry was concerned, the First Five-Year Plan was a success and the Second Five-Year Plan was a failure? (20 marks)

Tip

The question requires you to assess the relative success of each of these Five-Year Plans, so you need to ensure you examine positive and negative features of each. You cannot do this effectively unless you first establish the criteria on which you can judge them, so make these clear at the outset: meeting targets, increasing output of key goods, etc.

ACTIVITY
SUMMARY

The economy

1 Make a table with three columns, one for the aspects listed below, one for success and the other for failure:

Land redistribution; collectivisation; the People's Communes; SOEs; water conservancy projects; backyard furnaces; the Lushan Conference of 1959; the Third Five-Year Plan.

For each of the eight aspects, put the strongest piece of evidence in support of seeing it as a success, and then for seeing it as a failure. Explain each choice.

2 In what ways did the Soviet experts make a positive contribution to China's economic progress?

3 Compile a list of examples from the period that show that political rather than economic considerations mattered more to Mao.

WIDER READING

Becker, J. *Hungry Ghosts*, Henry Holt (1998)

Dikotter, F. *Mao's Great Famine*, Bloomsbury (2010)

Dikotter, F. 'The Great Leap Backward', *History Today* (November 2010)

Priestland, D. *The Red Flag – A History of Communism*, Grove Press (2009)

Short, P. *Mao – A Life*, Hodder and Stoughton (1999)

Yang, J. *Tombstone: The Great Chinese Famine, 1958–62*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux (2008)

2a.3 The Cultural Revolution and its aftermath, 1966–76

KEY QUESTIONS

- Why did Mao launch the Cultural Revolution?
- How effective were the Red Guards in carrying out the Cultural Revolution?
- How was the Cultural Revolution used to attack Mao's political and class enemies?
- How and why was the Cultural Revolution wound down from 1968?

The Great Cultural Proletarian Revolution exploded into life in May 1966. Having begun as an internal Party purge by Mao against his opponents, it broadened into a national mass campaign in which Mao used young people, especially students, to attack anyone (or anything) that could be regarded as opposing him. Two years of mayhem followed, in which thousands of people were beaten to death before order was restored by the People's Liberation Army, and the young Red Guards were dispatched to the countryside to learn what it was like to live as peasants. Nevertheless, the Cultural Revolution continued, albeit on a less intensive scale, until Mao's death in 1976.

Although many aspects of Chinese life were turned upside down in the period, it was not a revolution in the sense of the state being overturned. Nor was it really 'proletarian', since China remained overwhelmingly a peasant society, although it suited Mao's ideology to describe it as such. It was certainly 'cultural', since it involved attacks on all forms of behaviour and attitudes that differed from the approved line set by Mao.

The Cultural Revolution grabbed the attention of the outside world not only because of its excesses, but also because radical student activity in the West was attracting publicity in the same period, and people looked for links between the two developments.

The first battle in the Cultural Revolution was over a play, *Hai Rui Dismissed from Office*, written by Wu Han, the deputy mayor of Beijing. Set in the days of the Ming dynasty, 1,000 years ago, the plot was clearly allegorical: the central character, Hai Rui, was dismissed from his post for justifiably objecting to the cruel policies of his emperor, in an obvious parallel to the downfall of Peng Dehuai (who had raised questions about the Great Leap Forward at the Lushan Conference – see Chapter 2). Although it had made little impact when it was first performed in 1961, and even attracted some praise from Mao, it provided an ideal avenue through which to attack Liu Shaoqi, in whom Mao had lost faith by 1965. Wu Han's boss, the mayor of Beijing, was Peng Zhen, one of Liu's closest allies and the

1962 – January: 7,000-cadre meeting, followed by Mao's withdrawal from public life
Summer: CCP conference at which Mao calls for an end to revisionism

1963 – Lei Feng's diary published – used to promote cult of Mao
Launch of Socialist Education Movement to root out corruption inside CCP in rural areas

1965 – PLA becoming increasingly politicised by Lin Biao – ranks abolished and *The Little Red Book* issued to all soldiers
November: Attack on Wu Han launched in press. Mao moves to Shanghai

1966 – May: Central Cultural Revolution Group set up by Politburo to direct Cultural Revolution. Wall poster campaign begins at Beijing University. First Red Guard units formed

1966 – June: Failure of Liu's attempt to use work teams to moderate the behaviour of Red Guards

1966 – July: Mao's swim in Yangtze at Wuhan marks his return to public life

1966 – August: First huge rally of one million Red Guards in Tiananmen Square
Mao's wall poster calls on Red Guards to 'Bombard the Headquarters'. Violent attacks begin across China

1966 – November: Factory and office workers begin forming Red Guard units
Last of the eight Red Guard rallies in Beijing

1962 | 1963 | 1964 | 1965 | 1966 May | 1966 June | 1966 July | 1966 August | 1966 November

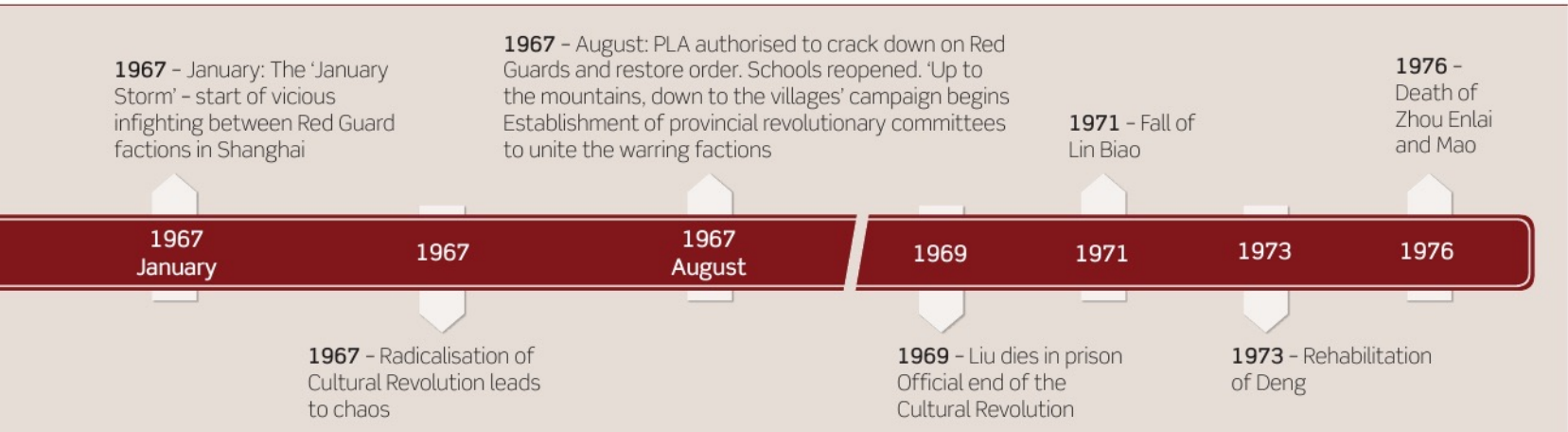
SOURCE 1 Red Guard youths cheering Chairman Mao, holding their copies of *The Little Red Book*, during the 1966 celebrations of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in Tiananmen Square, Beijing.



Politburo member responsible for culture. Therefore, by blaming Peng Zhen for failing to deal with his reactionary deputy, Mao was also able to discredit Liu by association. This is what Yao Wenyuan, a leading Shanghai radical who became a member of the **Gang of Four**, did on Mao's behalf, by denouncing Wu Han in the press in November 1965.

KEY TERM

Gang of Four
Made up of Mao's wife (Jiang Qing) and three Shanghai radicals: Yao Wenyuan, Zhang Chunquiao and Wang Hongwen. All hard-line radicals, they came to dominate the Central Cultural Revolution Group, which directed the Cultural Revolution after its creation in May 1966. They were arrested and put on trial after Mao's death.



WHY DID MAO LAUNCH THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION?

In a sense, the Cultural Revolution was the climax of the power struggle that had begun when Mao stepped back from the front line of politics in 1962, after the failings of the Great Leap Forward became more obvious. However, it was much more than a mere political struggle: it involved an ideological battle over the amount of pragmatism that was appropriate, and it reflected Mao's determination constantly to renew the revolution by involving each new generation in defending and extending it. It can also be seen as a new rectification campaign (see Chapter 1), to weed out Party officials who had lost their revolutionary edge and were therefore allowing capitalist attitudes to creep back in.

Divisions within the CCP between ideologues and pragmatists

Mao was, without doubt, an **ideologue.** He was uncomfortable with the measures taken to alleviate the damage caused by the Great Leap Forward because it meant admitting that his vision of a revolution in the countryside, achieved through the People's Communes, had failed. While the restoration of private trade and dismantling of the communes had helped to end the famine, Liu and Deng's measures smacked too much of revisionism for Mao's liking, and he began to see advocates of the pragmatic approach as 'capitalist roaders' – veteran Communists who, despite everything, still harboured capitalist mindsets and were capable of making the wrong ideological choice when it became available (choosing the 'capitalist' rather than the communist road).

Mao was also concerned that, although members of the ruling class had lost their political power in 1949–50, their attitudes still lived on in the assumptions and behaviour of people in general. As long as such attitudes remained embedded in the education system, and in the arts and culture, China could not advance, so those responsible would have to be removed. In Mao's view, the circumstances that had necessitated some compromise with capitalist attitudes had long since gone, and he was determined to eradicate those that held them, even if other leading Communists were willing to tolerate a broader Party membership that included intellectuals and members of the petty bourgeoisie.

The divide between the ideologues and the pragmatists had became more apparent after the 7,000-cadre conference, which had been summoned by Mao in January 1962, with the intention of rallying support inside the CCP against any further drift from his socialist ideals. (For details of this and its consequences, see Chapter 2.) It was after this conference that Mao withdrew temporarily from public life, leaving Liu, Deng and Zhou in charge.

Deng's view was summed up by his comment that it did not matter if a cat was black or white; as long as it caught the mouse, it was a good cat. Both Liu and the economic planners, Chen Yun and Bo Yibo, agreed with Deng that ideological compromises were essential to get China's economy back on its feet. They were also critical of mass mobilisation as a means of advancing the economy, arguing that recovery would only be possible if technical experts were put in charge and policies were imposed from above. Pragmatists also argued that China should pursue a more conciliatory foreign policy, since it could ill afford any confrontation with the USA over Taiwan, or with the USSR over its borders, while its economy was in such a dreadful state.

To Mao, these approaches were unnecessary, as he thought China was recovering economically by 1962. However, above all, they were ideologically wrong and the colour of the cat did matter. As with rectification campaigns, change should come from below, with Mao intervening to halt it once he felt things had gone far enough. While mass mobilisation may not have been the most economically efficient approach, to the ideologues it was essential because it kept people actively involved in protecting the gains of the revolution. This would prevent bourgeois attitudes creeping back in, which was the danger if the professional planners and experts were allowed to control things from above.

Mao had continued his efforts to hit back at the pragmatists by launching the **Socialist Education Movement** in 1963, which preached the virtues of a collective economic approach and aimed also to root out corruption among the rural cadres.

KEY TERMS

Ideologue
Someone who gives a high priority to theoretical ideas, as opposed to pragmatists, who put a higher value on taking whatever course of action is necessary to produce the required results. Ideologues emphasise the means, pragmatists the ends.

Socialist Education Movement
This was supposed to cleanse China of reactionary elements. Its failure to do this to Mao's satisfaction was to lead to the campaign against the 'four olds', launched in 1966.

Mao wanted this to be another mass mobilisation campaign, which would renew a sense of class struggle among the peasants, by allowing them to identify and attack corrupt Party officials (who were harbouring capitalist values) in struggle sessions (see Chapter 1). However, under Liu's direction, the campaign was centrally controlled and discipline was restored by Party work teams, who identified and dealt with corrupt elements themselves. Thousands were executed for economic crimes, but Mao was unhappy that the methods used had lacked the ideological element of class struggle through peasant participation that he desired, so the divisions between the two approaches remained as wide as before.

The quest for permanent revolution

Mao was always worried that the revolution should not lose impetus; otherwise the gains made since 1949 would slip away as old attitudes drifted back in. This is why he was so keen on mass mobilisation as a technique: people who had been directly involved in campaigns would fight to defend the changes they had helped to bring about, thereby preserving the advances made. While this does not mean that the Cultural Revolution in the form it took was inevitable, it is likely that Mao would soon have initiated some new mass drive to change society in order to forestall any drift into revisionism.

This is what Mao felt had gone wrong inside Soviet Russia, where he thought that Khrushchev and his successors had squandered Lenin's legacy. He believed they had betrayed the revolution by taking de-Stalinisation too far, and had become too liberal and too friendly with the West. Mao was determined that similar developments would not occur in China, either in his lifetime or after his death.

Mao was also aware that the younger members of the Party had not yet been seriously tested. They were too young to have taken part in the Long March, the struggle against Japan and the civil war, and by 1966, the 'three antis' and 'five antis' campaigns lay 15 years in the past. The younger generation needed to have direct experience of the revolutionary struggle in order to make them identify with it and to prepare them for what Mao saw as the inevitable future war with the West. Once they had engaged in acts of violence and murder on behalf of the revolution, they would become fully committed to defending it. The Cultural Revolution was the mass mobilisation of young people with this aim in mind.

The 1963 Socialist Education Movement can be seen as an early attempt to regenerate the revolutionary drive, which failed because Liu, as head of state, had prevented it becoming another mass mobilisation effort by keeping it under central control. Mao's reservations about Liu intensified after this, and the campaign against Wu Han, which sparked off the Cultural Revolution, was initiated in late 1965, with the aim of destabilising Liu.

Attacks on the bureaucracy

Closely linked to Mao's obsession with permanent revolution was his desire to undermine the bureaucracy. The old bureaucrats, with whom the Communists had been forced by circumstances to compromise in the early years after 1949, may have been removed, but Mao feared that the new bureaucracy that had been created to run Communist China was becoming a self-satisfied elite, motivated only by the privileges of power. If the revolution was to keep moving forward, and if the mistakes of Russia were to be avoided, then this new class of Communist bureaucrats would have to be purged before they became a new class of **mandarins** and lost touch with the masses.

Although he was frequently contemptuous about the peasants as individuals, Mao wanted to keep them as a class at the centre of the revolution. Mao had turned **Marxist theory** on its head by leading a peasant revolution in 1949, but since then, urban intellectuals and bureaucrats had run the country because they were the only people educated enough to do so. However, it was these urban intellectuals who had been most critical of the Great Leap Forward, and the Cultural Revolution can be seen partly as an act of vengeance against them, as well as an attempt to restore purity to the revolution by removing a privileged class of society.

Mao's conviction that 'capitalist roaders' were hijacking the Party had intensified during the Socialist Education Movement, and increased further when moderates like Liu and Zhou tried to calm down student unrest when it stirred in 1966. It was therefore time to wage a new rectification campaign, in order to root out complacency and corruption from the ranks of the Party. If bourgeois attitudes were becoming established inside the Party, then the Party would have to be cleansed.

Divisions within the CCP between supporters and opponents of Mao's policies

The Cultural Revolution began as a purge of pragmatists from the Party leadership, as Mao, in a manner reminiscent of his days as a guerrilla leader, circled around his opponents, and waited for the best moment to pick them off. However, he always left himself an exit strategy, in case things did not go according to plan. Mao's main supporters in this were **Lin Biao** (leader of the PLA), Mao's wife **Jiang Qing**, **Kang Sheng** and **Chen Boda**.

KEY TERMS

Mandarin
The official language of Chinese government, administration and law. Mandarins were the exclusive elite of high-ranking, privileged civil servants who had run China before the revolution of 1911, so they had no place in Communist China.

Marxist theory
According to conventional Marxist theory, revolution was only possible if it was led by the urban proletariat. By leading a peasant revolution, Mao had proved Marx wrong.

KEY PEOPLE

Lin Biao (1907–71)
A brilliant military commander before 1949, Lin only entered politics in 1959, when he replaced Peng Dehuai as defence minister following the Lushan Conference. He was responsible for developing Mao's personality cult in the 1960s, particularly through promoting the use of *The Little Red Book* (page 222) in the army. Whether he was an ambitious political schemer or a pawn exploited by Mao is unclear, but by bringing the PLA so closely under Mao's control, he provided Mao with the powerbase he needed to overthrow Liu, Deng and his other political rivals.

Jiang Qing (1914–91)
Technically Mao's fourth wife, Jiang had been kept out of politics until the Lushan Conference, but became Mao's ruthless cultural enforcer during the Cultural Revolution. She had close links with radical intellectuals in Shanghai and led the Gang of Four.

Kang Sheng (1898–1975)
Mao's chief of the secret police. He was ruthless, effective and corrupt, having orchestrated the rectification campaigns in the Yanan years and also built up an impressive collection of antiques confiscated from his victims. He worked closely with Jiang Qing.

Chen Boda (1904–89)
Headed the Central Cultural Revolution Group (CCRG), which directed the Cultural Revolution from inside the Politburo and collaborated with Lin Biao in putting together *The Little Red Book* (page 222). He had previously edited the Party journal, *The Red Flag*.

Mao's policies were opposed principally by Liu Shaoqi (the head of state since 1958) and Deng Xiaoping, along with the moderate economic planners Chen Yun and Bo Yibo, who wanted technical experts to play a greater role in the economy. Ever the diplomat, Zhou Enlai tried in vain to prevent the divisions between the protagonists from widening. However, although the pragmatists on the right of the Party held different views from Mao on the economy, there is no evidence that they were plotting against him politically.

Until the 7,000-cadre conference of 1962, Liu had been widely seen as Mao's chosen successor. After that, however, Mao openly accused Liu of choosing the 'capitalist road' at the Party conference of 1964, while alleging that Deng was trying to run an independent kingdom. Although the CCP presented an outward appearance of unity, behind the scenes the battle lines were being drawn. Liu and Deng had too much support in the Politburo and the wider Party for Mao to risk confronting them head on, which is why the attack on Wu Han was not launched until 1965, and then only indirectly, in Yao Wenyuan's newspaper article attacking Peng Zhen. Initially, the Party hierarchy tried to defuse the Wu Han affair and wanted to treat it as an academic rather than a political issue. However, the Shanghai radicals, backed by Lin Biao, deliberately escalated it into a crisis in early 1966, by insisting that cultural matters of this nature were part of the class struggle and could not be brushed aside.

Mao felt confident enough to make an open move against his rivals in the Party leadership in March 1966. Taking advantage of Liu's absence from the Politburo on a foreign visit, Mao got Lin Biao, Kang Sheng and Chen Boda to back his proposal that Peng Zhen be removed from his post. The task of removing him was left to Liu on his return, in case it proved difficult. Mao's strategy paid off, and both Deng and Zhou abandoned Peng to his fate, deciding to safeguard their own positions rather than risk supporting him. Shortly after this, in May, the Central Cultural Revolution Group (CCRG) was set up, a subcommittee of the Politburo given the task of directing the Cultural Revolution. It was dominated by Mao's supporters, including the Gang of Four. Again, blame for mistakes could be deflected onto them if necessary.

At this point, Liu and Deng still appear to have believed they were in control of events and that they retained Mao's support. They thought that Mao was merely launching a campaign to remodel culture, not realising this was the prelude to an attack on them. In May, the Politburo approved a circular targeting counter-revolutionaries in the Party, and then Kang Sheng went over the heads of the rest of the Party leadership to begin the **wall poster campaign** in Beijing University, in order to stir the students into action. As student protests spread across campuses nationwide, Liu and Deng's efforts to moderate them came to nothing. They sent out work teams intended to direct students' criticisms at specific individuals rather than against the Party in general, but not only was their advice ignored on the campuses, it also further alienated Mao because it ran counter to his wishes. What Mao wanted was a full-blooded attack on the Party in a rectification campaign from below, not the imposition of discipline from above. He began to speak in terms of great disorder being unleashed across the land so that order could be restored.

KEY TERM

Wall poster campaign
Wall posters, handwritten in large writing, were a traditional method of spreading protest propaganda that the Red Guards used widely to denounce their intended victims.

In July 1966, Mao completed his comeback to the front line of politics with his highly publicised swim in the Yangtze at Wuhan. Not only did this demonstrate that he was physically ready for a showdown (he was now 72), but choosing Wuhan (the site of the 1911 uprising) was a reminder of the revolution and the republic's birth. Mao then returned to Beijing, which he had not visited since November 1965, and forced Liu and Deng to make self-criticisms before the Party Central Committee for their error in sending in the university work teams. Both were accused of being 'spearheads of the erroneous line' and told they would have the chance to make amends for their mistakes.

SOURCE 2 Photograph of the Wuhan swim, which Mao used to demonstrate that he was ready to re-emerge from the political sidelines. On 16 July 1966, he joined 5,000 swimmers in the annual swim across the Yangtze in what was a blatant act of political theatre. He floated downstream for over an hour, joking with other swimmers, some of whom swam carrying banners celebrating Mao's achievements. One month later, the Cultural Revolution would be fully under way.



Then, on 18 August, the first of the eight mass rallies of Red Guards was held in Tiananmen Square. The Red Guards were unleashed to attack the 'four olds', and the Cultural Revolution got fully underway.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

The start of the Cultural Revolution

1 Construct a detailed timeline for the events of 1965–66. Make a comment on each event's significance in terms of what it reveals about the start of the Cultural Revolution. For example, for Yao Wenyuan's article attacking Wu Han in November 1965, you might say it showed that Mao was increasingly frustrated with Liu, but was distancing himself from the attack in case it backfired.

2 Mao had several reasons for starting the Cultural Revolution, but they are hard to disentangle from each other. Draw up a table of four columns, corresponding to the headings in the text. List each piece of supporting evidence under the appropriate heading, then use arrows to show the links between as many points as you can.

3 Explain why the Cultural Revolution started when it did.

4 What does the way Mao handled the early stages of the revolution (in late 1965 and early 1966) reveal about his tactics?

5 What evidence supports the argument that some form of Cultural Revolution was inevitable at some point in the mid-1960s?

A Level Exam-Style Question Section B

How accurate is it to say that the Cultural Revolution was a success for Chairman Mao? (20 marks)

Tip

Make sure you consider how the outcomes (political, economic, social, cultural and military) over the whole period 1966–76 affected Mao, not just those of the radical early phase.

HOW EFFECTIVE WERE THE RED GUARDS IN CARRYING OUT THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION?

The most chaotic and destructive period of the Cultural Revolution lasted from August 1966 until the end of 1967, which is when the Red Guards were at their most active.

Mao's hold on young people

Mao's reasons for focusing on the young were clear enough: plunging the young generation into revolutionary activity would help ensure the long-term survival of communism in China, and the more radical the changes they made, the less likelihood there would be of turning back the clock. He also valued their dynamism, which they had shown in the 'antis' campaigns of the 1950s and the early days of the Great Leap Forward, and he realised that, once unleashed, they would be difficult to stop.

SOURCE 3

S. Schram, 'Mao Tse-Tung's Thought from 1949–76', in Merle Goldman and Leo Ou-Fan Lee (eds), *An Intellectual History of Modern China* (2002). These were Mao's comments to Kang Sheng in late 1965. The reference to monkeys refers to the days of the old imperial court, when the monkeys kept as pets had a reputation for causing mayhem.

> We have to depend on them to start a rebellion, a revolution... otherwise we may not be able to overthrow the demons and monsters... We must liberate the little devils. We need more monkeys to disrupt the palace.

Mao's success in manipulating the young so adeptly owes much to the efforts that had gone into developing his **personality cult** since the early 1960s, and to his shrewd understanding of mass psychology. By 1966, carrying a copy of ***The Little Red Book***, compiled by Lin Biao and Chen Boda, had become a social necessity, and consulting it in order to find an appropriate comment from Mao was regarded as the normal way to settle any argument. The groundwork for this personality cult had already been prepared by the appearance of ***The Diary of Lei Feng*** in 1963, which emphasised the loyalty towards Mao of the ordinary man, as opposed to the selfish careerism of the bureaucrats who ran the Party and state.

The personality cult was well established by 1966, and this made it possible for young people to see a contrast between Mao, the heroic figure who had freed China from a century of foreign domination by leading the revolution in 1949, and the Communist Party that supervised and repressed them. The Party was now being portrayed as a threat to Mao's achievement, because it had been infiltrated by counter-revolutionaries who had a different agenda.

Mass rallies had proved a successful technique of exposing opposition during the Hundred Flowers and anti-rightist campaigns, so using them in 1966 specifically for young people made sense. It also made the students feel important, because they were now being given the responsibility of directing the revolution themselves. Mao claimed he needed their support to help him defeat the reactionary elements who were threatening to take over.

Mao's call to students to 'Bombard the Headquarters' in his wall poster of August 1966 was therefore greeted enthusiastically by students. Respect for age and wisdom may have been deeply ingrained in each generation, but when Mao told the young that rebellion was virtuous and chaos better than order, the young had no qualms about rising up against figures of traditional authority. Peer group pressure to conform was irresistible in the context of the huge Tiananmen Square rallies, the first of which was attended by a million adoring followers.

KEY TERMS

Personality cult
The Mao cult was designed to magnify the importance of Mao and establish a mindset, particularly among young people, in which they unquestioningly accepted Mao's views. Mao had previously criticised Russian leaders for similar actions, accusing them of elevating themselves above the Party, but he seems to have had no qualms about adopting the approach himself in the 1960s.

The Little Red Book
Some 750 million copies of *The Little Red Book* were eventually distributed across China. It became China's secular bible, with Mao's thoughts on a wide range of topics divided into 33 chapters. The preface urged readers to 'study Chairman Mao's writings, follow his teachings and act according to his instructions'. Lin had begun putting it together in 1962, and by 1964 was using it in the PLA as a tool of indoctrination. Once Mao realised its potential, he persuaded the Party Central Committee to publish it on a national basis the following year.

The Diary of Lei Feng
Fabricated by the government's propaganda department, this claimed to be the journal of a PLA lorry driver, whose every thought and action was inspired by his devotion to Mao. Again, this found its way into the mainstream of everyday life and the school curriculum.

SOURCE 4

Mao's response to the big character poster written by Nie Yuanzi at Beijing University in June 1966, which began the attacks on the teachers and Party leadership. White terror is a phrase used to describe a reactionary terror, in other words a conservative backlash against the radical left.

> BOMBARD THE HEADQUARTERS, AUGUST 5TH, 1966.
>
> China's first Marxist-Leninist big character poster and commentator's article on it in the *People's Daily* are indeed superbly written! Comrades, please read them again. But in the last fifty days or so some leading comrades from the central down to the local levels have acted in a diametrically opposite way. Having the reactionary stand of the bourgeoisie, they have enforced a bourgeois dictatorship and struck down the surging movement of the Great Cultural Revolution of the Proletariat. They have stood facts on their head and juggled black and white, encircled and repressed revolutionaries, stifled opinions differing from their own, imposed a *white terror*, and felt very pleased with themselves. They have puffed up the arrogance of the bourgeoisie and deflated the morale of the proletariat. How vicious they are! Viewed in connection with the right deviation in 1962 and the wrong tendency of 1964 which was 'left' in form but right in essence, shouldn't this prompt one deep thought?

A further reason why the young responded so readily to the calls to rise up was the lack of career opportunities available for students whose families carried the 'wrong' class label (see Chapter 1). Unless they came from a soldier's, worker's or peasant's family, or were the children of existing Party officials, young people's career prospects were restricted. Joining a Red Guard unit gave youngsters from more middle-class backgrounds the chance to prove by their actions that they were true Communists and therefore deserved better job opportunities.

THINKING HISTORICALLY Evidence (5b)

The importance of context

Documents (texts) are like small pieces torn from a larger tapestry (context). Historians have to reconstruct the larger pattern into which documents might fit in order to use them to construct accounts of the past. The problem is that texts have multiple contexts. Historians often debate how best to contextualise the documents they want to interpret.

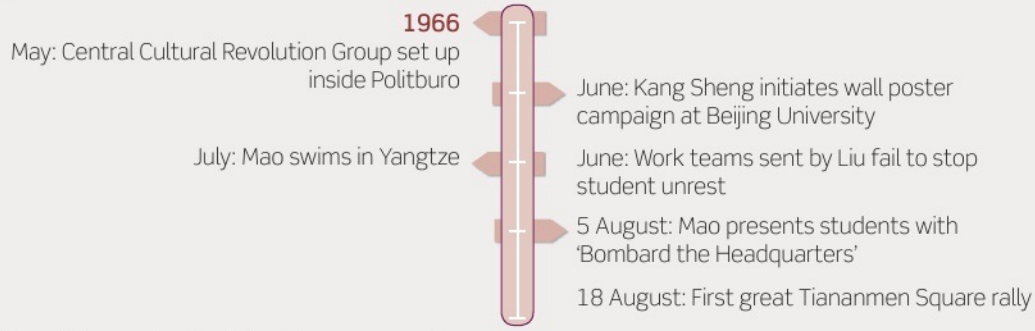
'Bombard the Headquarters' was the title of Mao's big-character wall poster to be displayed at Beijing University, given to the students on 5 August 1966. It can be read as a rallying call to the students to rise up against all forms of authority which were holding them down.

1 Summarise the main points made in the poster. What is Mao implying that the students ought to do?

2 Who do you think the poster was being aimed at and why do you think that? (Which groups, which individuals?)

3 The timeline below puts the poster into its short-term context.

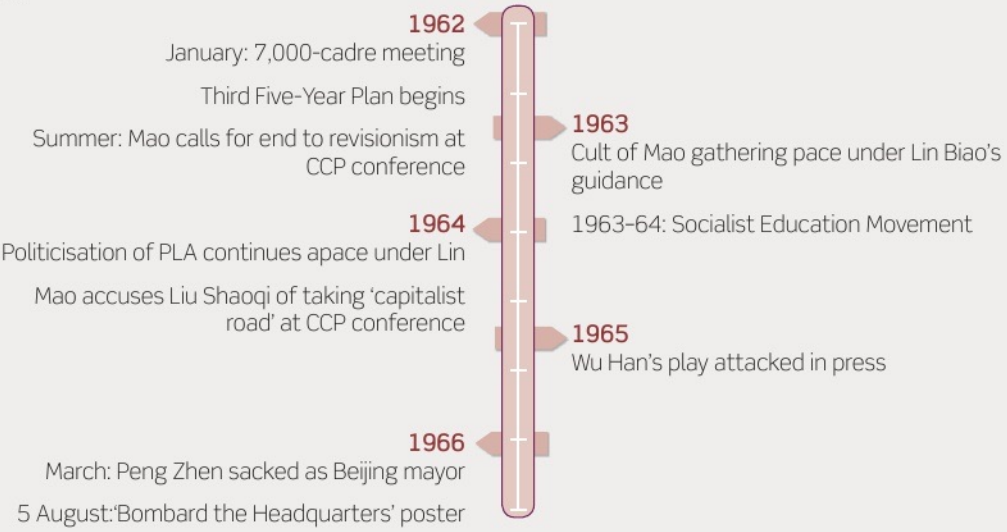
Sequence of events 1



Explain how the writing of the poster fits in to this sequence of events.

4 This timeline puts the poster's appearance into a longer-term context.

Sequence of events 2



Explain the timing and purpose of the poster in the context of the above events.

5 Explain how knowing the 'bigger picture' changes your understanding of the purpose behind the poster.

6 Can you think of any additional contextual factors that might shed more light, or a different light, on the purpose and timing of the poster?

7 Why is it important for historians to spend some time thinking about possible contexts for a document before they start to use it to draw conclusions about the past?

Finally, there were many young people who felt that they had been shabbily treated by the Party when they had been pressurised into relocating from the cities to the countryside after the Great Leap Forward. For them, this was the chance to hit back at the Party cadres.

EXTRACT 1 From P. Short, *Mao: A Life* (1999). Short is a journalist and author who worked for many years as a BBC foreign correspondent.

The extent of this outpouring of violence, and the rage of the young Red Guards against their elders, suggest the real depths of frustration that now lay at the heart of Chinese society. The youth needed little urging from Mao to rise up against their parents, teachers, Party cadres and the elderly, and to perform countless acts of calculated sadism. For years the young had been called on to lead lives of revolutionary sacrifice, sexual restraint, and absolute obedience to the State, all under the conditions of perpetual supervision. They were repressed, angry and aware of their powerlessness. They eagerly seized on the order to throw off restraint, and the natural targets were those who seemed responsible for their cramped lives. To them Mao stood above this fray, all-wise and all-knowing.

The mass rallies of 1966

If there was an official starting date for the Cultural Revolution, it was in May when the Politburo circular against revisionists was approved and the CCRG was set up. However, the event that brought it home to the public at large was the first mass rally in Beijing on 18 August. At sunrise that morning, Mao reaffirmed his return to the public arena when he walked out to greet the one million Red Guards who were crammed into Tiananmen Square, in what was the first of eight mass rallies held in 1966. The symbolism of the occasion was clear for all to see: Mao's army uniform demonstrated his closeness to the PLA and he was flanked by its leader, Lin Biao, who addressed the crowd on Mao's behalf. While Liu, Deng and Zhou were also on the balcony, they were positioned at some distance from Mao and wore civilian clothes. Mao reappeared periodically to receive thunderous applause, while the screaming hordes of Red Guards waved their *Little Red Books* and chanted in adulation.

In the following days, chaos and violence spread across China, as the Red Guards eagerly went out to do Lin Biao's bidding by smashing the 'four olds' of old ideas, customs, habits and culture. Schools and universities remained closed, and the students found themselves free to attack anyone in authority or from the 'wrong' background.

The millions of Red Guards who attended the eight rallies were a testament to both the enthusiasm of the young to be at the forefront of the revolution, and also the active organisational role of the PLA. Without the army's logistical support in helping to transport such vast numbers of people in and out of Beijing from the provinces, many students would simply not have been able to access the rallies. Free rail passes also made it easier to attend rallies, and enabled the Red Guards to travel further in their subsequent pursuit of targets to attack, as well as to indulge in what became known as 'revolutionary tourism', the chance to see more of China.

The first rally used the hysterical hero-worship of Mao to launch the Red Guards into action, having identified the targets to be attacked, and reassured the students that they would have official approval for whatever actions they took. Staging the rally on such a colossal scale ensured that a genuine sense of solidarity was created. While Mao rarely attended the subsequent rallies, claiming he found them too tiring, it was important to repeat the process for new recruits, to keep the sense of urgency at a high level.

AS Level Exam-Style Question Section A

Study Source 5 before you answer this question.

Why is Source 5 valuable to the historian for an enquiry about the enthusiasm of young people towards the Cultural Revolution in 1966?

Explain your answer using the source, the information about it and your own knowledge of the historical context. (8 marks)

Tip

The focus here should be on why Mao appealed to young people, which you can go some way towards explaining by developing Grey's comments in the second part of the source.

SOURCE 5 The words of Anthony Grey, a British correspondent working for Reuters Press Agency, who was held under house arrest for over two years during the Cultural Revolution. Officially, he was accused of spying, but he was probably held as a hostage in retaliation for the arrest of eight pro-Chinese journalists by the Hong Kong authorities (Hong Kong remained in British hands until 1997). From Michael Lynch, *The People's Republic of China 1949-76 2nd edition* (2008).

The most extravagant and ridiculous language was used all the time about him (Mao) in the official press... I saw him once on May Day; I was in a crowd in a park and was talking to members of the crowd... saying 'What were you hoping to see?' They said, 'Chairman Mao, we love Chairman Mao.' And they really did say it in a way that made me think of the tendency of young people who want something to idolise, be it pop singers or film stars or in their case only one charismatic leader in a nation. I think he used the old admiration for China's emperors and the son of heaven idea which was very strong – inculcated almost into the Chinese nature.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

Launching the Red Guard movement

1 It may seem a risky strategy to have unleashed the Red Guards in this way. Why do you think Mao was confident he could keep control of events?

2 Explain fully two of the reasons why young people responded so readily to the call to act.

3 Explain why Mao felt it necessary to 'blood' the young generation in first-hand revolutionary activity.

The attacks on the 'four olds'

While it was Mao who had identified the 'four olds' (old culture, old ideas, old customs and old habits) that needed to be dealt with in order to root out revisionism, it was Lin Biao who instructed the Red Guards to attack them in his speech to the 18 August rally. These categories are impossible to separate and were kept deliberately vague, so that they could be stretched to cover any element that suited Mao. By labelling them as 'olds', he hoped to give the young extra incentive to eradicate them, as it was made clear that nothing in China's past was worth preserving. Anything representing past values was denounced under the blanket term of '**Confucius** and Co.', and fit for destruction. Only the future mattered.

KEY TERM

Confucius
Lived in the 6th century BC, and is generally regarded as China's most influential philosopher. His ideas, which focused on the importance of harmony, respect for legitimate authority and order, had become accepted as fundamental to Chinese life, but were regarded with contempt by the Communists because they had helped preserve the status quo for so long.

SOURCE 6

Nien Cheng, *Life and Death in Shanghai* (1986). Nien Cheng survived over six years in prison, where she was sent because she was the widow of a manager who had worked for Shell. She emigrated to the USA in 1980, where she wrote her autobiography.

In the days after Mao reviewed the first group of Red Guards in Beijing, and gave them his blessing, the Red Guards in Shanghai took over the streets. The newspaper announced that the mission of the Red Guards was to rid the country of the 'Four Olds'... There was no clear definition of 'old'. It was left to the Red Guards to decide. First of all they changed street names. The main thoroughfare of Shanghai along the waterfront, the Bund, was renamed Revolution Boulevard... the road on which the Soviet Union had its Consulate was re-named Anti-Revisionist Street... They smashed flower and curio shops because, they said, only the rich had the money to spend on such frivolities. The other shops were examined and goods they considered offensive or unsuitable for a socialist society they destroyed or confiscated. Because they did not think a socialist man should sit on a sofa, all sofas became taboo.

AS Level Exam-Style Question Section A

Study Source 6 before you answer this question.

How much weight do you give the evidence of Source 6 for an enquiry into the attack on the 'four olds' launched by the Red Guards in August 1966?

Explain your answer using the source, the information about it and your own knowledge of the historical context. (12 marks)

Tip
Make sure you use the date, the level of detail and the tone of the language when you are examining what the source reveals. For example, does the fact it was written some 20 years after the events appear to be reflected in the detail of her recollections?

The Red Guards were quick to take up the call, particularly targeting Western influences in fashion, such as high heels, winkle-pickers and so-called 'Hong Kong style' clothing and hairstyles. Correction stations were set up on street corners, and offenders had their heads shaved there. Street names were changed to reflect new values: the address of the British Embassy in Beijing became Anti-Imperialist Street. Some people adopted new given names, such as 'Red Hero' or 'Militant', reflecting their revolutionary ideals. It took all of Zhou Enlai's diplomatic skills to dissuade the Red Guards from changing the colours of the traffic lights. They reasoned that, if red was the colour of the revolution, then it should mean go not stop, but accepted Zhou's argument that red was stopping threats to the revolution.

While such actions were relatively harmless, many were not: houses were ransacked in search of bourgeois possessions, such as musical instruments, jewellery, antiques and paintings, which were dragged out and destroyed. Books considered to have been written by bourgeois authors were burned in street bonfires or pulped. Even if their owners could avoid the ritual struggle sessions, they were often the victims of impromptu beatings that sometimes had fatal consequences.

Religion was deemed to fall into an 'old' category, and attacks on it intensified to such an extent that no public worship or ceremonies were allowed. Clergy who had survived earlier persecutions were rounded up and imprisoned, prompting criticism from the outside world.

The traditional nuclear family of parents and children also came under attack, as young people were urged to treat Mao and the newly cleansed CCP as their true parents, to whom they owed obedience. It was expected that children would inform the Red Guards of parents or relatives who clung on to old attitudes.

The physical destruction of cultural sites is covered below (page 226), but all cultural activity was subjected to scrutiny by the CCRG, where Jiang Qing was given responsibility to 'purify' the nation's culture. With her former career as an actress, and strong links with Shanghai radical writers, she set about the task with fanatical zeal. Culture was not seen by Mao as a peripheral matter; to him, the culture of a nation should reflect its political priorities, so it was important to 'cleanse' cultural activity of inappropriate values and make it truly socialist.

Although the campaign against the 'four olds' was intense and violent, where it focused on deeply ingrained and long-held attitudes its effects were short-lived, and many traditional views reappeared. For example, the survival of the 'old' attitude of

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

Attacking the 'four olds'

1 Why did Mao package the values to be attacked as the 'four olds'?

2 Use the sources and the other material to draw up a list of things that came under attack, putting each in the most appropriate of the 'four olds' categories.

3 Why do you think Western ideas and culture came under such attack?

showing respect for the dead was clearly shown when thousands of mourners attended a huge Festival of the Dead ceremony in April 1976, in tribute to the recently deceased Zhou Enlai. This happened while Mao was still alive.

The growth of anarchy and the use of terror

Given free rein to attack figures of authority, and egged on by wall posters in the universities and articles in the press, students turned first on unpopular teachers, and then on anyone whose lifestyle suggested wealth, privilege or an adherence to old or foreign ideas. Because Mao had described chaos as more virtuous than order, and the police and army stood aside, there were few restrictions on what the Red Guards could do. Those accused were subjected to lengthy struggle sessions in which they were often physically attacked, tortured and forced to confess to 'crimes' against the Chinese people. Previous contributions to the revolution or military achievements did not guarantee immunity from attack, as was shown by the cruel treatment meted out to Huang Xinting, the military leader of the Chengdu region. He was seen as a potential barrier to Lin Biao's continued advancement, a 'crime' that was compounded by having been too close to a friend of Peng Dehuai.

Examples of savage brutality were apparently endless, but what started as random attacks in August and September 1966 soon became more systematic, as officials in the Ministry of Public Security passed names of members of the **bad classes** on to the Red Guards.

KEY TERM

Bad classes
These were usually listed as: landlords, rich peasants, reactionaries, bad elements and rightists.

The Babaoshan crematorium in Beijing disposed of 2,000 bodies in a two-week period in 1966. Reliable statistics are inevitably hard to come by, but some idea of the scale of the killings can be seen from the trial of the Gang of Four in 1980, who were accused of having sanctioned the deaths of over half a million people. The violence was not confined to the principal cities: in the southern province of Guangxi, 67,000 killings were recorded over the ten years 1966–76, while in the outlying provinces of Sichuan, Tibet and Mongolia, the figure ran into hundreds of thousands.

The formation of new Red Guard units by radical factory and office workers in November 1966 escalated the violence, as did the appearance of new units from students who came from non-Party bourgeois backgrounds, which ironically turned out to be among the most militant. Previously denied the opportunity to participate in revolutionary activity due to their background, they seized the chance to demonstrate their credentials.

As the movement widened, splits and rivalries emerged, particularly in Shanghai, which degenerated into chaotic infighting between different factions during January 1967. Eventually, Mao intervened, with the help of the PLA, to end what became known as the January Storm, and the city was placed under the control of the Shanghai Revolutionary Committee, a combination of PLA representatives, Party officials and revolutionaries. This became the model that was applied to other cities and provinces over the next year.

As the Cultural Revolution began to penetrate more sections of society, arguments broke out between the PLA, anxious to be exempted from the same struggle sessions as civilian society, and the CCRG, which wanted the same criteria to apply to every institution, without exception. When Mao failed to give a clear lead, the PLA took matters into its own hands to suppress radicals in some provinces in the February Crackdown. Leading Politburo members appeared to support this action, when they also called on the Red Guards to calm down their activities, so it looked as though the excesses of the Cultural Revolution would be ended early in 1967.

However, in typically perverse fashion, Mao dug his heels in and called for the CCRG to override both the Politburo and the PLA, and China drifted further into factional disputes and chaos. Only in August 1967, when Mao realised that the PLA might be so seriously undermined that it would be incapable of defending the country, did Mao make another U-turn, by authorising the PLA to crack down on radical groups when it needed to. This decision marked a watershed and, from that point on, the radical phase gave way to consolidation.

EXTEND YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Defending the country
At this time, China's southern and northern borders were under threat. To the south, the increased American involvement in the Vietnam War posed a risk. Meanwhile, relations with Russia had deteriorated to such an extent that border disputes over Xinjiang in the north-west and Manchuria in the north-east were worsening, and would almost lead to war in 1969. Mao could not allow national security to be jeopardised by subjecting the army to the same level of scrutiny as the Party had endured.

Cultural destruction

As part of their attack on the 'four olds', the Red Guards embarked on a frenzy of destruction of cultural objects between mid-August and late September 1966. According to official documents, they destroyed two-thirds of the 7,000 places of historical and cultural importance in Beijing, where they also broke into over 100,000 homes in search of 'old' artefacts. However, support for their actions was by no means universal. Zhou Enlai prevented them from attacking **the Forbidden City**, by bringing in a PLA unit to defend it, and even Chen Boda, on the radical left of the Party, expressed reservations about the scale of cultural vandalism.

KEY TERM

The Forbidden City
Beijing's best-known monument, the walled inner city that had been the home of the emperors for 500 years, until their overthrow in 1911. It is now a World Heritage Site.

Perhaps their greatest single act of desecration was the attack on Confucius' home town of Qufu in Shandong province, where Red Guards spent four weeks vandalising countless books, paintings, statues, graves and monuments with connections to Confucius. But here, as in Beijing, local people intervened to protect some historical treasures from destruction.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

The Red Guards

1 Why did 1966–67 contain so much violence?

2 Identify and explain three reasons why the most radically destructive period of the Cultural Revolution was relatively short.

3 Why do you think divisions emerged in the Red Guard movement?

4 Construct a timeline in as much detail as you can to cover the events of 1966–67.

5 Why did Mao eventually decide to let the PLA clamp down properly on the Red Guards in August 1967, and not earlier in the year?

HOW WAS THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION USED TO ATTACK MAO'S POLITICAL AND CLASS ENEMIES?

The attacks on Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping

Essentially, both President Liu and Party General Secretary Deng were removed from their posts for ideological reasons. The pragmatic approach they had used to good effect in extricating China from the Great Leap Forward was tolerated by Mao as a means to an end, but when they continued to advocate pragmatic policies, Mao became convinced that the future of the revolution was not safe in their hands. However, he could not act against them while both remained popular in the Politburo, and by entrusting Liu and Deng to oversee the ending of the rural crisis, Mao had ceded some of his grip on power to them.

Liu and Deng supported pragmatic economic policies and were less committed than Mao to a collectivist approach, which is why they had no qualms about allowing the restoration of private farming. Mao, however, continued to put great faith in advancing the revolution by mass mobilisation campaigns from below, unlike Liu and Deng, who preferred a top-down approach, where policies were imposed from above. This difference, which became clear during the Socialist Education Movement of 1963–64, was to resurface when student unrest took off in 1966.

By late 1964, Mao was accusing Liu of taking the 'capitalist road', and Deng of acting independently, and although on the surface they appeared to be working together, once Mao felt he had built up enough support outside the Politburo, he was looking for the opportunity to strike against them.

By the end of 1965, Mao had the support he needed. He knew he could count on Lin Biao and the PLA, Jiang Qing and the Shanghai radicals, Chen Boda (who had control of propaganda) and Kang Sheng, the security chief. It was at this point, therefore, that he instigated the attack on Wu Han, to see if the power of Liu and Deng in Beijing could be shaken.

By the time of the Party Central Committee meeting that criticised them in August 1966, Liu and Deng must have realised they had been outmanoeuvred. Although they both appeared with Mao on the balcony at the rally on 18 August, it was clear from their position in the background that they no longer held high influence. In October 1966, following a Red Guard demonstration directed specifically at them, they were both formally dismissed from their positions within the government and Party. Wall posters appeared, naming and denouncing both Liu and Deng for betraying the revolution. The position of president, which Liu had held, was left vacant until being officially scrapped in 1969.

Liu and his wife, Wang Guangmei, were dragged from their house and beaten by a jeering mob. Liu was then forced to undergo a series of brutal struggle sessions, before being imprisoned in conditions deliberately intended to break his already fragile health. He had diabetes, but when he also contracted pneumonia, he was refused permission to go to hospital. He died in November 1969.

Wang was subjected to a humiliating interrogation before being paraded before a large crowd wearing a necklace of table tennis balls and a revealing skirt, which she was accused of having worn on a recent trip to Indonesia in order to seduce President Sukarno. She was sentenced to death, but the verdict was not carried out because Mao intervened to save her.

Deng was less harshly treated, but was also subjected to public humiliation before being sent to perform corrective labour in a tractor factory in Jiangxi province. He survived the experience and, thanks partly to his links with Zhou, he was rehabilitated into the Party in 1973. His son, however, was left permanently paralysed when Red Guards threw him from an upstairs window.

The attack on Lin Biao

While the reasons behind the fall of Liu and Deng are clear, the explanation of Lin Biao's fall in 1971 is more controversial.

Lin had played a pivotal role in the Communist victory in the civil war, after which he had slowly risen up the political pecking order. Only Mao stood above him in the army command structure after he replaced Peng Dehuai as defence minister in 1959, and he had used this power to politicise the PLA, abolishing ranks and using *The Little Red Book* to increase the level of political indoctrination. Lin was the principal architect of the personality cult, and the PLA played a significant role in orchestrating the huge 1966 rallies. Under Lin's guidance, the PLA became an even more radical force, which Mao could use to advance the revolution, and Mao showed his gratitude by insisting that Lin become his designated successor when Liu fell later that year.

However, Lin's rise to political prominence may not have been driven purely by personal ambition, because he was often swept along with the tide of events. It was only with reluctance that

he had agreed to take over as defence minister in 1959, and he was forced to accept elevation in 1966 only because the decision was passed by the Party Central Committee, and to refuse it would have been to end his career completely. Although he was a central figure at the Tiananmen Square rallies, and undoubtedly helped to drive the Cultural Revolution forward, by urging the Red Guards to attack the 'four olds' and by working so closely with Jiang Qing, his role was mainly reactive – endorsing whatever Mao said, slavishly flattering him, but rarely taking the initiative after 1966. Despite the obvious dangers to the stability of the PLA, he had allowed students in military academies to overthrow their military teachers during the radical period of the Red Guard movement, and had failed to support those PLA leaders who demanded a crackdown against the Red Guards in February 1967 – more evidence of his reactive rather than proactive approach.

Lin's poor health was also a factor in his behaviour. Regarded by some as a hypochondriac, he often used health problems to explain why he delegated so many tasks to others and was reluctant to take on new responsibilities. Among the wide range of ailments he suffered from was an acute fear of water, which prevented him from washing or eating fruit. As he got older, he became more difficult to engage with, becoming distant and detached, even reclusive.

Once the radical phase of the Cultural Revolution was over, the PLA as a crusading force was less important to Mao, which made Lin's backing as its commander-in-chief less vital. However, Mao's decision to remove him was taken not because Lin had outlived his usefulness, but because he had become too popular. The 1969 amendment to the Constitution had confirmed Lin as Mao's successor, by which time he had the support of a substantial section of the Politburo. Mao, fearing that Lin might combine his military and political support to become a Chinese **Bonaparte**, began manoeuvring to undermine his position.

EXTEND YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Bonaparte
It was a common fear among Communists that the revolution might be derailed by the rise of a military dictator, as had happened when Napoleon Bonaparte had taken power in France. Stalin had shared similar fears about Trotsky, the leader of the Soviet Red Army.

His suspicions were also increased by Jiang Qing, who by this time had fallen out with Lin over the extent of her interference in army matters. In typical Mao fashion, he began his attack indirectly, by undermining the position of some of Lin's allies. This started with Chen Boda, who was arrested and forced to make a self-criticism for factional behaviour. As in Soviet Russia, being accused of belonging to a faction was regarded as potentially treacherous. It was assumed that anyone doing so must be plotting with allies against the leader.

Mao continued his attack by gradually packing the Military Affairs Commission with his supporters, and then reorganising the Beijing military region so that Lin's allies were posted elsewhere. By early 1971, it must have been obvious to Lin that his position was untenable, but precisely what happened next remains unclear, because many of the official records that would have thrown light on it were destroyed immediately after Mao's death.

The official version of events is that Lin and his son, Lin Liguo, were planning to assassinate Mao and then seize power in a military coup. When this was discovered, Lin and his entourage attempted to flee and take refuge in Russia, only for their plane to crash in the desert in Mongolia, killing all on board. While there seems little doubt that there was a plot being hatched, Lin's own contribution remains unknown. It may be that Lin Liguo, who was a high-ranking air force officer, instigated it, with his father only a reluctant participant. When details of the plot were passed to Zhou Enlai by Lin Biao's daughter, all chance of its success disappeared, hence the desperate flight towards Russia. It seems likely that the crash was an accident caused either by the pilot flying too low to avoid radar detection, or because they set off in such a hurry that they had taken on insufficient fuel.

While the outcome of the affair removed a rival that Mao was in the process of purging anyway, it plunged him into a long period of depression, and his health never fully recovered. Not only was Lin the only political leader who had attempted to resist being purged, it was also difficult to package the news of his treachery without casting doubt on the credibility of the whole regime. Lin had been regarded by the public as Mao's principal supporter; he was his designated successor and he commanded the army. If Lin was revealed to have been a traitor, what else should the public disbelieve about the regime?

For this reason, news of Lin's fall was not released until 1972, and the following year, Jiang Qing launched an extensive media campaign to discredit Lin by accusing him of being a Soviet spy, who was masquerading as a man of the radical left. The public were called on to 'criticise Lin Biao and Confucius', the implication being that Lin was a modern reincarnation of Confucius and his reactionary ideas. For many Chinese, the fall of Lin Biao marked a turning point in their relationship with Mao, who came to be regarded with increasing scepticism. Inevitably, those who had been close to Lin were purged.

EXTRACT 2 Philip Short, *Mao: A Life* (1999).

What did it say about the Chairman's judgment if Liu Shaoqi (a 'scab and renegade'), Chen Boda ('a sham Marxist') and Lin Biao ('a counter-revolutionary careerist'), all of whom had been at Mao's side for decades, were suddenly, one after the other, unmasked as hidden enemies? The 'Hundred Flowers' and the anti-Rightist Campaign had cost Mao the trust of China's intellectuals. The chaos and terror of the Cultural Revolution had destroyed the faith of the Party hierarchy and tens of millions of ordinary citizens. Lin Biao's fall was the last straw. After 1971, general cynicism prevailed. Only the young (and not all of them), and those who had profited from the radical upsurge, still believed in Mao's revolutionary new world.

SOURCE 7 Nien Cheng, *Life and Death in Shanghai* (1986). Nien Cheng heard about Chen's downfall while she was still in detention, and questioned her friends when she was released later. She was the widow of a manager at Shell, where she had also worked. This made her a target for the Red Guards, and she was held in solitary confinement for six years. She left China in 1980.

The first inkling I had of another round of power struggles at the top was when I saw in the newspaper a list of members of the standing committee of the Politburo. Missing was the name of Chen Boda, one of the radical leaders who had charted the course of the Cultural Revolution from its very beginning. Soon, articles of criticism, without mentioning his name, began to appear. They were directed against a 'fake Marxist' who had declared himself to be a 'humble commoner'. The sudden omission of a prominent man's name without explanation almost always meant he was in disgrace. The criticism against a 'fake Marxist' seemed to point to someone renowned as a theorist of Marxism. Chen Boda was just such a man.

I was greatly puzzled by this unexpected development because Chen Boda was known as a faithful follower of Mao and his long time confidential secretary. It was whispered that many essays purportedly written by Mao were actually from the pen of Chen Boda. Though he did not seek the limelight like other radical leaders such as Jiang Qing or Lin Biao, the Chinese people knew him to have been one of the elite group of theorists Mao relied upon.

I questioned several friends (after my release) and it seemed that at the second plenary session of the ninth Central Committee held at Lushan in August 1970, the new constitution of the PRC was discussed. Chen Boda proposed that the post of Chairman, left vacant by the downfall of Liu Shaoqi, be maintained and nominated Lin Biao as the new Chairman. Already alarmed by the rapid expansion of Lin Biao's power, Mao was not keen to give him more. He declared that he favoured the abolition of the post. In a heated debate, Mao denounced Chen's proposal as a counter revolutionary move designed to re-establish pre-Cultural Revolution conditions.

Lin's fall also reopened the question of Mao's successor. There were no obvious candidates: Zhou was considered too old and too moderate to be entrusted with carrying the revolution forward; Jiang Qing had too many personal enemies; Zhang Chunquiao, another member of the Gang of Four, had shown leadership qualities, but had too narrow a support base. In this situation, factional rivalry increased, as potential candidates jockeyed to put themselves in a strong position from which to move when Mao died.

SOURCE 8 Communiqué of the Central Committee of the CCP on the death of Lin Biao, 18 September 1971.

On 12th September, when Chairman Mao was making an inspection tour in the south, Lin Biao took advantage of the opportunity and attempted to blow up the train in which Chairman Mao was riding near Shanghai in order to accomplish his objective of assassinating Chairman Mao. When the plot failed and was exposed, Lin Biao hurriedly left Peking on the afternoon of 12th September and boarded a British made Trident jet military transport, with the intention of surrendering to the enemy and betraying his own country. After crossing the national border, his plane crashed near Undur Khan in Mongolia. Lin Biao, Ye Qun (his wife), Lin Liguo (his son), and the pilot were all burned to death.

Lin Biao, by his act of surrendering to the enemy and betraying his own country, invited his own destruction. Yet his death could not redeem his crime, and his notoriety will last for ten thousand years to come. What has been most intolerable is that Lin Biao stole a huge quantity of secret documents and foreign currencies and shot and wounded one of his long time bodyguards.

Toutou, daughter of Lin Biao, placed national interest above filial piety by refusing to escape with Lin Biao, and she reported the situation to the Premier in time, which led to the foiling of her father's monstrous conspiracy. Toutou has thus performed a great service to the Party and the State and helped the Party Central Committee smash a serious counter revolutionary coup d'état.

SOURCE 9 Li Zhisui, *The Private Life of Chairman Mao* (1994). Doctor Li was Mao's personal physician and probably spent more time in Mao's company than any other person. He emigrated to the USA in 1988, which is where he published this account.

By August 1971, Mao's distrust of Lin Biao was reaching breaking point. He had been told about a secret spy organisation that Lin's son, Lin Liguo, had set up in the air force and which was conspiring to take power from Mao. The Chairman needed to shore up his own support in the military. Mao thought that the loyalty of the regional and provincial military commanders still rested with him (which is why he then set off by train for the south to meet up with some of them).

The Chairman had long been suspicious of Lin Biao, and he had been warned of a conspiracy. He thought Lin wanted him dead and he was afraid he might try to poison him. But I do not think Mao ever believed that Lin might be plotting to assassinate him and seize power himself.

I do not know whether the report (by Zhou Enlai) detailing Lin Biao's conspiracy was accurate. Zhou Enlai, after all, had a personal stake in the outcome. Zhou had been closer to Lin than he now wanted to admit... and had continued reporting directly to Lin Biao even as the strains between Mao and Lin had grown, and on matters that Mao had specifically asked to be kept secret.

Lin Doudou's [Toutou] report that Lin Biao had been kidnapped by her mother and brother was false. Doudou was so devoted to her father that in her eyes he could do no wrong, but her relationship with Ye Qun was so strained that she was convinced Ye was not her natural mother. The victim of her own self-delusions, Lin Doudou convinced herself that her father had been kidnapped. She could not admit that he had plotted a coup and was fleeing.

SOURCE 10 Comments made by Mao to Li Zhisui while on their train tour of southern China, sometime between 14 August and 12 September, when they got back to Beijing. News of the apparent assassination plot and Lin's flight broke two hours after they arrived back, after Toutou had tipped off Zhou Enlai. From Li Zhisui, *The Private Life of Chairman Mao* (1994).

We should try to save Lin Biao. No matter who makes mistakes, we cannot disregard the necessity of unity. It doesn't look good. After I return to Beijing, I'll look up Lin Biao and his followers and ask for a talk. If they don't look for me, I'll look for them. We may be able to salvage some of them, but not others...

ACTIVITY KNOWLEDGE CHECK

The fall of Lin Biao

1 What similarities can you see in the tactics Mao employed to bring down Liu, Deng and Lin?

2 Use Source 7 and the text to explain why the fall of Lin put Mao in an awkward position.

3 What evidence can you find to suggest that Lin Biao was more a victim of circumstances and other people's machinations than a schemer in his own right?

THINKING HISTORICALLY Evidence (6a)

Arguments and facts

Work in groups.

1 Decide why facts are important in history. You may also want to decide on the difference between fact and opinion at this stage.

2 Read sources 8 and 9.

a) In what respects do they disagree?

b) What do they agree on?

c) What reasons do you think might explain the disagreements?

3 Which do you think is most likely to be correct and why? What would you need to find out before being able to make a judgment about this?

4 Which do you think is least likely to be correct? Does that mean you would totally discount it as being useful as a source?

5 Do the disagreements fundamentally alter our understanding of the fall of Lin Biao? Explain your answer.

The purging of the CCP membership

The attack on the leadership of the CCP, which is how the Cultural Revolution had begun, developed into a broader purge of its membership at all levels, as Red Guards took up Mao's call to 'Bombard the Headquarters'.

Higher-ranking members were affected the most; only nine of the 23 Politburo members of 1966 held on to their posts. Four of the six regional first secretaries were purged, as were some 70 percent of provincial and regional officials. Two-thirds of the members of the Central Committee that met in 1966 had been purged by the next time it gathered in October 1968.

At a local level, 20 percent of Party officials were purged and three million cadres were sent to May 7th cadre schools. Here they were to rediscover their revolutionary zeal, through a combination of political study and hard physical labour alongside the peasantry, in camps usually far away from their homes. While most survived and were later reintegrated into the Party, it was a brutal experience that involved torture and beatings that were sometimes fatal.

In January 1967 (in what became known as the January Revolution or Storm), the very existence of the CCP seemed to be in the balance. This was when militant factory and office workers formed their own Red Guard units and overthrew the Party leadership in Shanghai, where they set up a People's Commune that was to be run by freely elected representatives. However, having originally backed this initiative, Mao then changed his mind, saying the Party should still have some influence over the direction of events. Instead, a new revolutionary committee, comprising Red Guard, PLA and existing CCP officials was set up to run Shanghai, in what became the model for other cities to copy.

In this way, the power of the Party was seriously reduced, without being destroyed. However, it soon became clear that the balance

of power had swung to the army: in the subsequent shake-up of provincial Party branches, 25 of the 29 first secretaries lost their jobs, most of them to serving PLA officers.

Once the most radical period of the Cultural Revolution was over, Mao reconstructed the Party. This began in October 1968, with the calling of a full Central Committee meeting, packed with his supporters, which declared that the Cultural Revolution had been both necessary and a great victory. The Central Committee finally expelled Liu from the Party and government. Then, in April 1969, a full Party Congress (the ninth) declared the Cultural Revolution to be over and adopted a new Party constitution, stressing the importance of Mao Zedong Thought and the continuation of class war. (See Chapter 1 for Mao's main ideas, which constituted the basis of 'Mao Zedong Thought'.)

The most obvious change was the increased influence of the PLA – two-thirds of the delegates to the Congress were members, as were 45 percent of the new Central Committee and half of the Politburo. The other noticeable change was the extent of Mao's control over the new Party. So many veteran members had been purged and replaced by less experienced newcomers that his ability to manipulate it was greater than ever.

Purging 'Capitalist roaders' and foreigners living in China

'Capitalist roader' was a term used to describe anyone perceived as clinging on to a capitalist mindset. Continuing to wage class warfare was important to Mao, so to be accused of preferring the 'capitalist road' was a serious offence. While it was levelled at pragmatists in the Party leadership such as Liu, Deng and Bo Yibo, because of specific policies that they advocated, it was also a convenient general label to justify attacking any enemy.

Attacks on 'capitalist roaders' were mainly focused in the urban areas, where the staff of practically every factory, office, shop and school were subjected to scrutiny, in case their background or lifestyle could be considered bourgeois. Not only did this have damaging effects on the thousands of individuals involved, but the disruption it caused to working life led to a serious fall in industrial production, which was down by 13 percent in 1967 and still further in 1968, before quickly picking up again once the persecution of the workforce stopped.

SOURCE 11 A photo taken in January 1967 in Changchow, showing a child at nursery school thrusting a spear into a straw effigy representing an American. The label on the effigy translates roughly as 'US bad guys'. Not only was this meant to embed anti-American thinking into the minds of the young from an early age, but it also got them (in this case, girls) used to handling weapons.



The pursuit of 'capitalist roaders' continued even after the Red Guards had been disbanded, when it was extended into the countryside. It was the key part of the 'cleansing of class ranks' campaign that the CCRG developed early in 1968, during which committees were set up across the country and given the task of eradicating all signs of capitalism. The result was more vicious than anything staged by the Red Guards and accounted for well over 100,000 deaths. In 1970, a new campaign, called 'One strike and three antis', was launched to remove all attitudes that were preventing economic progress, before Mao intervened to halt it in 1971. Research into records of deaths in rural counties shows that violence in these areas was at its peak between 1968 and 1971, in other words, after the Red Guards were sent away.

The victims of the Cultural Revolution were not solely Chinese people. In contravention of all the normal codes of diplomacy, foreign embassies and their staff were attacked by the Red Guards while the police stood aside. In August 1967, a mob of Red Guards broke into the British Embassy in Beijing, physically attacking the staff.

SOURCE 12 This is how Donald Hopson, the British Ambassador, described the events in August 1967 in his despatch to London (in Michael Lynch, *The People's Republic of China 1949–76 2nd edition*, 2008).

> Outside the crowd broke the glass of the windows, but the bars and plywood shutters held. The mob then started to burn straw at the windows. We threw water through the gaps, but the room began to fill with smoke... it was clear the mob would soon be through the wall and there was a danger that we should be burned alive if we stayed. I gave orders for the emergency exit to be opened. We were hauled by our hair, half-strangled with our ties, kicked and beaten on the head with bamboo poles.
>
> Some of the staff were paraded up and down, forced to their knees and photographed in humiliating positions. All were beaten and kicked... most of the staff were eventually rescued by the army and plain clothes police agents.

One week after these events, staff poured out of the Chinese Embassy in London's Portland Square, armed with sticks and machetes, and staged a demonstration against the continued British control of Hong Kong. They then retreated back inside, safe from arrest because their diplomatic immunity was respected. Altogether, 30 countries experienced violent incidents involving Chinese militants. In Burma and Indonesia, locals attacked Chinese expatriates in retaliation. Britain was particularly targeted because of Hong Kong (which returned to Chinese rule in 1997), but embassies and staff of ten other countries also came under attack, including those of India, France, Russia and Holland.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

The purging of the Party and foreigners

1 How did Mao ensure that the CCP was under the control of the PLA after 1968?

2 Why do you think it was necessary to purge the membership of the Party as well as the leadership?

3 In what ways were the attacks on 'capitalist roaders' and foreigners potentially counterproductive?

4 Why, then, do you think Mao approved of the attacks?

AS Level Exam-Style Question Section B

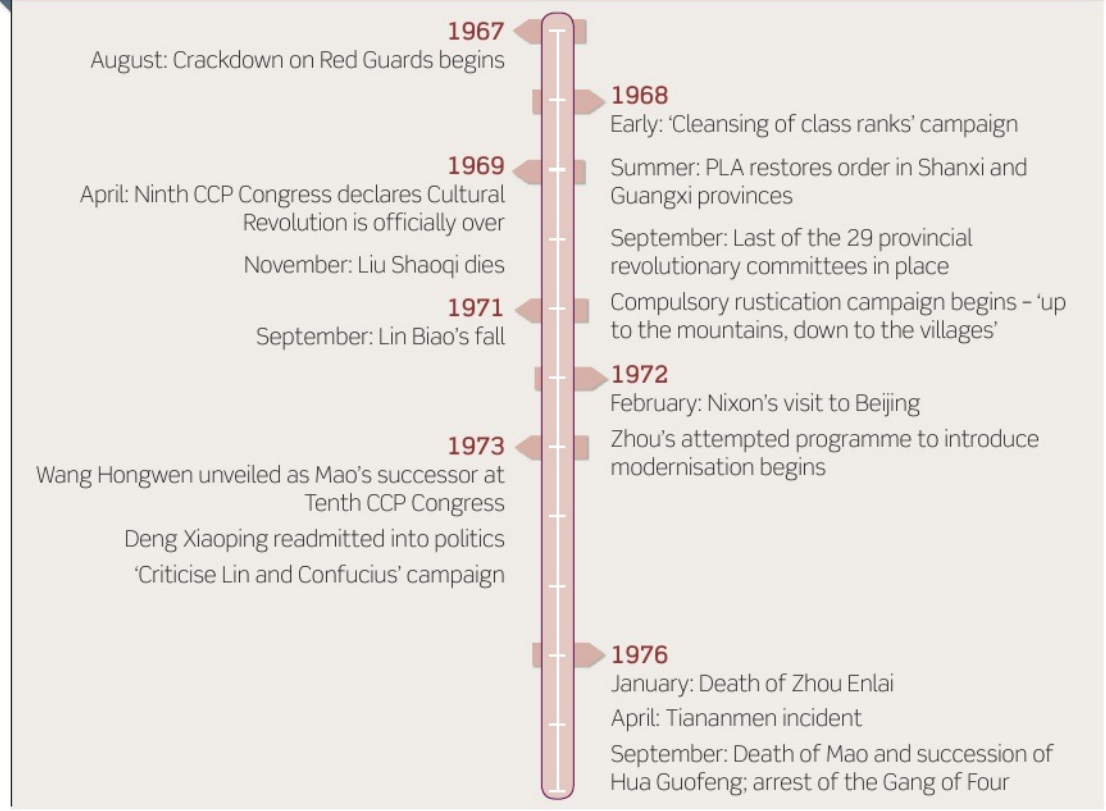
How far did the events of 1966–68 change the Communist Party in China? (20 marks)

Tip

This is a question about the extent of change, so you need to identify the main changes to the structure and membership of the Party during those years, but also to identify features that were changed less. It has a narrow focus – do not start discussing other things (apart from the 'events of 1966–68') that you think may have impacted on the Party.

HOW AND WHY WAS THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION WOUND DOWN AFTER 1968?

TIMELINE OF KEY EVENTS IN THE WINDING DOWN OF THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION



The restoration of order by the PLA

In August 1967, Mao finally decided to allow the PLA to clamp down on the Red Guards. The fact that he had almost decided to do this in February, before changing his mind to give them longer to wreak havoc, and the ease with which the PLA did restore order after August, suggests that Mao had always been in control of events, and was confident that the PLA would be willing and able to carry out his wishes. Mao had no objection to the violence of the Red Guards, but by this time they were undermining the army's role and were inflicting unsustainable damage on China's economic and educational systems.

For their part, the PLA was anxious to end the Red Guard violence because it did not want to open itself up to the self-criticism and struggle sessions that radicals were pushing for. Neither did the PLA want to risk jeopardising its status as the creator and defender of the revolution, which the Red Guards might eventually challenge if allowed to continue unchecked indefinitely. Once Mao had removed four of the most radical members of the CCRG, which was pushing for the radical action of the Red Guards to be extended, it proved straightforward for the army to restore order.

Mao ordered the rival Red Guard and workers' factions to form alliances and stop fighting each other. He speeded up the creation of the new revolutionary committees, which were henceforth to run the cities and provinces. Significantly, membership of these committees was dominated by PLA officers at provincial, county and local level, giving the military the main influence over the new political structures. The last of the 29 provincial committees was in place by September 1968, prompting the CCRG to declare that the entire country was now red.

Then the PLA began a full-scale purge of the Red Guards, disbanding the last Red Guard units and closing down their newspapers by the end of 1968. The army had already shown that it had taken over Red Guard revolutionary tasks, by launching the campaign to 'cleanse the class ranks'.

It took military action to end the most serious unrest, the full-scale civil war in Shanxi and the looting of weapons bound for Vietnam in Guangxi, but both provinces were eventually pacified in the summer of 1968.

The PLA was also entrusted with re-establishing discipline in the schools and universities, which had been closed for two years. Although the threat of force was usually sufficient to accomplish this, it proved particularly difficult at Qinghua University, where Red Guards refused to lay down their arms and ten died in the fighting that ensued.

Education could now resume, but the combination of two years without schooling and the drop in industrial output caused by so much infighting made urban youth unemployment a serious issue. This was a contributory factor behind the **rustication programme**, launched in 1968.

KEY TERM

Rustication programme
There had been an earlier, voluntary rustication programme, under which urban school leavers were encouraged to relocate to the countryside and work there, in order to help restore food production levels immediately after the famine. This new programme was compulsory.

The 'up to the mountains and down to the villages' campaign

The new rustication programme involved the compulsory movement of some five million young people from the cities to the countryside between 1968 and 1970. As well as easing urban unemployment, the scheme fulfilled a number of other functions: it dispersed many former Red Guards to areas where they would cause less trouble; it taught the urban young about the life of the Chinese peasant, while reminding them that China's revolution was based on the peasantry; and it hardened the new class of young urban intellectuals and bureaucrats by introducing them to the realities of manual labour. It also reinforced the army's control over the young, since many of the farms on which they were employed were run by the military.

Most of those relocated had a miserable time, having to learn new skills from a hostile peasantry who had little extra food with which to feed them. Rural conditions were primitive and standards of living were lower than most of the newcomers were used to. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that most hated the experience, and that many of the generation who served in the Red Guard and were then sent to the countryside became disillusioned with Mao, feeling they had been used as pawns in his power struggle.

SOURCE 13

Jung Chang, *Wild Swans* (1992). Jung Chang was a keen Red Guard as a teenager, in the early years of the Cultural Revolution, but her opinions of Mao altered when her parents became victims of persecution and she realised how her generation was being used. After rustication, she was able to resume her university course, and left China to study in England two years after Mao's death. *Wild Swans* is an account of the lives of three generations of her family and won her international acclaim as a writer.

I was not very popular in the village, although the peasants largely left me alone. They disapproved of me for not working as hard as they thought I should. Work was their whole life, and the major criterion by which they judged anyone. Their eye for hard work was both uncompromising and fair, and it was clear to them that I hated physical labour and took every opportunity to stay at home and read my books. Virtually every day I had some sort of diarrhoea and my legs broke out in infected sores. I constantly felt weak and dizzy, but it was no good complaining to the peasants; their harsh life had made them regard all non-fatal illnesses as trivial.

SOURCE 14

Anchee Min, *The Cooked Seed* (2013). She was only 17 when she was sent 'down to the villages' in the rustication campaign. The campaign had been launched in 1968, but was still operational in 1974, which is the year she is writing about here.

Mao had won the Cultural Revolution. Using the students, calling them the Red Guards, he had successfully eliminated his political opponents. But the youth had started to cause unrest in the cities, so Mao sent them to the countryside. He told us to get a 'real education by learning from peasants'.

It didn't take long for us to realise that we were in hell. We thought we were growing rice to support Vietnam, but we could barely grow enough to feed ourselves. The salt-saturated land was hostile. We worked eighteen hours a day during planting seasons. There were a hundred thousand youths between seventeen and twenty-five in the camps near the East China Sea. The Communist Party ruled with an iron fist. Harsh punishment, including execution, applied to those who dared to disobey the rules. There were no weekends, holidays, sick days or dating. We lived in army-style barracks without showers or toilets. We worked like slaves. Since childhood we had been taught that we owed our lives to the Communist Party.

A Level Exam-Style Question Section A

Study Sources 13 and 14 before you answer this question.

How far could the historian make use of Sources 13 and 14 together to investigate the consequences of the rustication campaign?

Explain your answer using both sources, the information about them and your own knowledge of the historical context. (20 marks)

Tip

The sources focus on the consequences for the young people involved. Try to extend the range of the answer by considering wider consequences – on agriculture, the urban situation and so on.

The return to power of Deng Xiaoping and Zhou Enlai

Zhou Enlai, who held the post of Prime Minister from 1949 until his death in 1976, was the ultimate survivor. Although he got into trouble on a number of occasions, he was never purged because he was far too useful to Mao and was skilful at distancing himself from awkward situations. His pragmatic stance had made him a target of the radicals during the early phase of the Cultural Revolution, but Lin Biao's demise helped to restore his credibility.

His role in uncovering the alleged assassination plot, and in foiling Lin's escape by closing China's airports, emphasised his personal loyalty to Mao. The fact that it was to Zhou that Lin's daughter had leaked news of the plot was testament to the trust in which he was widely held. In the years immediately after the plot, Zhou's moderate approach seemed appropriate, because Mao was still unsure how to present Liao's treachery to the public: should he be condemned as a traitor on the far left (which is what his conduct as PLA commander appeared to indicate) or on the far right (which is where his plotting seemed to put him)? Zhou used the opportunity presented by this uncertainty to revive his call for the **Four Modernisations**, which he had been advocating since 1963.

KEY TERM

Four Modernisations
Zhou had been advocating a pragmatic programme to develop agriculture, industry, defence and education on a more systematic basis for many years, but without much success. They became the future cornerstone of Deng's policies, when he assumed control after 1976.

A fundamental part of this was to establish closer links with the West in order to acquire more technological expertise, and Zhou played the key role in facilitating US President Nixon's visit to China in 1972. Although full diplomatic relations were not to be activated until 1979, the tone of more conciliatory relations had been set in place. Common enmity with Russia had convinced the USA of the value of treating China as an equal, and Mao had now adopted the more limited ambition of guaranteeing China's survival as a communist state, rather than trying to make it the launching pad for the spread of world communism.

Encouraged by the success of the Nixon visit and Mao's continued uncertainty over how to interpret Lin's behaviour, Zhou embarked on a concerted effort to restore economic production and stability after the disruption of the Cultural Revolution. Chen Yun (the veteran economic planner), while too old to resume work, at least appeared in public to endorse Zhou's policies. The introduction of university entrance exams also did something to raise standards in further education.

However, Zhou was unable to remove the radicals from their positions of power in the CCRG, and Mao swung his support back behind them in 1973, when he eventually decided that Lin had in fact been a rightist pretending to be on the far left. This slowed Zhou's progress with his policies and led to him becoming the renewed target of attacks from the radicals, whose confidence had now been restored.

KEY PERSON

Wang Hongwen (1935–92)
A member of the Gang of Four who had risen to prominence during the Shanghai disturbances of early 1967. His background as a worker, peasant and soldier ticked all the right boxes, and he was unveiled as Mao's choice to succeed him at the Tenth Party Congress of 1973.

Despite this setback, Zhou did manage to get Deng Xiaoping brought back into the fold in 1973. Deng had been identified as a serious 'capitalist roader' in 1966, when he was sacked from his post and sent into exile to perform manual labour. However, as a pragmatist and as someone who could get things done, he too benefitted from the post-Lin need for moderation, and Zhou was able to persuade Mao to bring him back into the government. Mao's initial motive in restoring Deng was to employ him to help train his newly chosen successor, **Wang Hongwen**.

Mao's plan was for Deng and Wang to work together for a few years; if all went well, Wang would be able to go it alone after Mao's death. In this way, Deng played an important role in helping Mao to strike a balance between the radicals and the pragmatists between 1973 and 1976. Deng also led China's delegation to the United Nations, to which they had been admitted in 1971 when they gained US support, and he was appointed army chief of staff in order to keep the regional military

KEY TERMS

Warlordism
Powerful regional military leaders who had taken advantage of the collapse of central government control to set themselves up as independent rulers in the 1920s.

Tiananmen Incident
A memorial service for Zhou, who had died in January 1976, became a huge demonstration in Tiananmen Square in favour of the type of moderate polices associated with both Zhou and Deng.

Dazhai
A model commune in Shanxi province that had been transformed by a production brigade applying the full range of Maoist methods. In reality, it was heavily subsidised by the state, but it served as an ideal propaganda showpiece where foreign visitors could be impressed.

commanders in check and prevent any revival of **warlordism**. In March 1973, he was appointed vice premier, and in the following year, he regained his old post as Party secretary.

However, Deng found himself purged again in April 1976, when Jiang Qing and the radicals went on the attack after the **Tiananmen Incident** (see below). By this time, Mao's health was so bad that he was in no position to stop them.

Reining in the Gang of Four

The Cultural Revolution may not have ended in 1969, as the Ninth Party Congress claimed it had, but it was a much less radical affair after the Red Guards were disbanded. The radical extremists in the Gang of Four continued to exert influence on the direction of events through their domination of the CCRG, but it was the PLA that really controlled what happened after 1968. Members of the PLA saw themselves as the true guardians of the revolution, and, while they shared many aims with the CCRG, they were strong enough to resist any threats to their power that excessively radical initiatives might pose.

As well as the army's dominance, another significant factor that marginalised the Gang of Four was the fall-out from the Lin Biao affair. The uncertainty over how to explain this had given Zhou, assisted by the rehabilitated Deng, the opportunity to restore moderate policies. It made many others in the Party leadership question whether the Cultural Revolution had in fact gone too far, and made them reluctant to risk further radical initiatives, for fear of damaging even more the shaky confidence in the regime that now prevailed.

However, the Gang of Four did still have some influence, which they successfully reasserted in 1973, when they launched their anti-Confucius campaign to discredit Lin. Depicting Lin as a reactionary in the same category as Confucius made it possible to extend the campaign into an attack on anyone of moderate outlook, which of course meant Zhou and Deng. Critical of their conciliatory attitude to the West and pragmatic economic policies, the Gang of Four called for a boycott of Western technology and a renewal of the People's Communes. In order to promote their demands, they revived Mao's slogan of 'Learn from **Dazhai**', which he had first used against the 'capitalist roaders' back in 1964.

Initially they got Mao's backing, because their Dazhai campaign agreed with his desire to see the revolution being constantly renewed. However, they lost it when it became clear to Mao that they were really more concerned with jockeying for position in the succession struggle than with promoting continuous revolution. Consequently, Mao withdrew his backing and expressed his support for Zhou instead. The extent of the Gang of Four's dependence on Mao had been clearly revealed.

However, the radical extremists again reasserted themselves briefly in early 1976, taking advantage of the death of Zhou (which removed a moderating influence) and Mao's worsening health (which made it easier to circumvent him). Zhou died of lung cancer in January, and a supposedly low-key memorial service for him in April turned into a huge demonstration in Tiananmen Square, in favour of his moderate policies and attacking the Gang of Four. There were violent and bloody confrontations between riot police and demonstrators before order was restored. The Politburo blamed Deng for organising the Tiananmen Incident and dismissed him from his post as Party secretary. Rather than stay in Beijing to defend himself, Deng went into exile and waited for events to sort themselves out, from what he hoped would be a safe distance.

While the Politburo's response to the Tiananmen Incident showed that the radical extremists still had some power, the fact that the demonstration took place at all, and was so vehemently critical of the radicals, puts their declining influence into perspective.

The death of Mao, 1976

Mao died in September 1976, but his health had been in serious decline since the fall of Lin Biao in 1971, which is why the succession struggle was so prolonged.

Opinions differ as to the precise medical conditions from which Mao was suffering, but it is clear that lung infections made worse by years of smoking were affecting his heart, and it is possible that he was also suffering from Parkinson's disease. Mao's physician, Li Zhisui, has claimed that from 1973

onwards, Mao was dependent on massive injections of drugs that rendered him comatose most of the time. From January 1976 until his death in September, he was incapable of giving any decisive guidance.

Whatever the exact details, the result of Mao's decline was to give those closest to him more power, as they interpreted his wishes for much of the time, and to encourage contenders for the succession to manoeuvre themselves into the best possible position from which to seize power when Mao died.

Liu Shaoqi had been replaced by Lin Biao as heir apparent in 1966, but since the fall of Lin in 1971, the succession question had been complicated. Zhang Chunqiao, a close associate of Jiang Qing in the Gang of Four, had been briefly considered by Mao, but then rejected on the grounds that his support base would be too limited. In 1973, Mao appeared to have chosen Wang Hongwen, the youngest of the Gang of Four, and had begun to use Deng to groom him for eventual power. However, by 1975, it had become obvious to Mao that Wang was still too much under the influence of Jiang Qing to be a realistic choice, so by the time of Mao's demise in 1976, the succession question was once again unresolved.

The Politburo decision to blame Deng for the Tiananmen Incident of April, and to strip him of his posts, galvanised Mao into making his final choice of successor – in the form of **Hua Guofeng.**

Confident that they could outmanoeuvre Hua, the Gang of Four set about trying to undermine his position after Mao suffered a heart attack in May. However, the effect of this was to drive Hua into an alliance with military commanders in the PLA. When Mao died, and Hua took over as head of Party and state, the PLA helped Hua arrest the Gang of Four, who had made the tactical error of staying in Beijing rather than linking up with their many armed supporters in Shanghai. In this way, civil war was avoided, and the moderate, pragmatic tone of policies reintroduced by Zhou and Deng after the Cultural Revolution were revived.

Deng felt safe enough to return to politics from his exile in Guangzhou, and by 1980, had managed to replace Hua. That same year, the Gang of Four went on trial.

KEY PERSON

Hua Guofeng (1921–2008)
A Politburo member and capable administrator, whose career had risen during the Cultural Revolution. He was not restricted by being linked to any particular faction, but his views were clearly moderate and pragmatic.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

Scaling down the Cultural Revolution

1 Mao veered between radical and pragmatic approaches in the period 1968–76. Make a table with two columns, headed radical and pragmatic, and list as many relevant examples of each as you can find.

2 Why do you think he switched so frequently?

3 What do you think was the main reason why the Gang of Four lost Mao's confidence?

4 What was the main reason why the Gang of Four failed to seize power when Mao died?

THINKING HISTORICALLY Cause and consequence (5b)

Causation relativity

Historical events usually have many causes. Some are crucial, while some are less important. For some historical questions, it is important to understand exactly what role certain factors played in causing historical change.

Significant factors affecting the timing of the decision to rein in the Red Guards in August 1967
The PLA was unwilling to expose itself to scrutiny by Red Guards
Red Guard units spent much time fighting each other in 1967
Huge numbers of people at all levels were purged from the Communist Party in 1967–68
Liu and Deng were both demoted from power in late 1966
For a brief period in January 1967, Shanghai fell into the hands of radical revolutionaries
Several foreign embassies were ransacked by Red Guards during 1967
By September 1968, the reorganisation of provinces under revolutionary committees was complete
Schools and universities were closed for two years
Thousands of 'capitalist roaders' were persecuted in 1966–68

Answer the following questions individually.

Timing of the decision to rein in the Red Guards

1 Take each of the causal factors in turn and explain the part it played in prompting the decision to call off the Red Guards.

2 How important was the attitude of the PLA in this decision?

3 Are there any points earlier in the year when you might have expected the Red Guards to have been reined in? Why do you think the decision was not taken sooner?

Nature of the radical period before August

4 How far had the Communist Party been changed by events between August 1966 and August 1967?

5 In what ways had events in this period affected the economy?

6 What effect do you think the events of January 1967 in Shanghai had on the subsequent nature of the Cultural Revolution?

7 In what respects did the Cultural Revolution continue after the Red Guards were reined in?

ACTIVITY SUMMARY

The Cultural Revolution

1 There were points throughout the whole period when it appears that Mao may have been losing his grip on events, as well as examples of occasions when he acted decisively to bring them back under control. Make a table with two columns, and put as many examples as you can find (with dates) in each column.

2 Convert your findings into a graph. Use the *x*-axis (horizontal) for the years 1966 to 1976; use the *y*-axis for the extent of Mao's control – full control (100 percent) at the top and no control (0 percent) at the bottom. Mark the key events on the graph.

3 Young people were Mao's agents for bringing about change in the Cultural Revolution.

a) In what ways did young people benefit from their experiences?

b) In what ways did they suffer because of them?

4 What additional factors will have affected the way Mao's policies impacted on the lives of the young?

5 The succession question was a problem that loomed large, especially after 1970. Why do you think it was hard for Mao to resolve it satisfactorily?

WIDER READING

Frank Dikotter is planning a new book on the Cultural Revolution.

Davin, D. *Mao: A Very Short Introduction*, OUP (2013)

Hudson, R. 'The Great Helmsman goes swimming'. Short article in *History Today* (May 2012)

There are several personal accounts of survivors' experiences, including:

Cheng, N. *Life and Death in Shanghai*, Grafton (1987)

Min, A. *Red Azalea*, Bloomsbury (1994)

Yang, R. *Spider Eaters*, University of California Press (1987)

2a.4 Social and cultural changes, 1949–76

KEY QUESTIONS

- To what extent did the status of women change between 1949 and 1976?
- How successful were the changes made to education and health provision?
- Why did the Communists attempt to change Chinese culture?
- How did the Communists seek to destroy the practice of religion?

KEY TERMS

Confucianism
This was not a religion that involved set rituals or practices. It was more an outlook on the world, which was optimistic, emphasising that all people were capable of improvement. The afterlife was regarded as being beyond human comprehension; therefore what mattered was to improve daily reality to the greatest extent possible. This involved showing respect for all other people and trying to learn from them, whatever their beliefs. Obedience to authority and preservation of the social hierarchy became important aspects of Confucianism, but were added much later by emperors in order to legitimise their authority as rulers.

Patriarchal
Male dominated.

To the Communist rulers of China, social and cultural policies served a vital ideological function. The policies were intended to do much more than eradicate outdated practices like foot-binding, and remove glaring inequalities in the treatment of women, such as arranged marriages. They were intended to sweep away old-fashioned values, based on obedience to traditional authority figures, and replace them with a new classless society, where the only source of authority was the Communist Party.

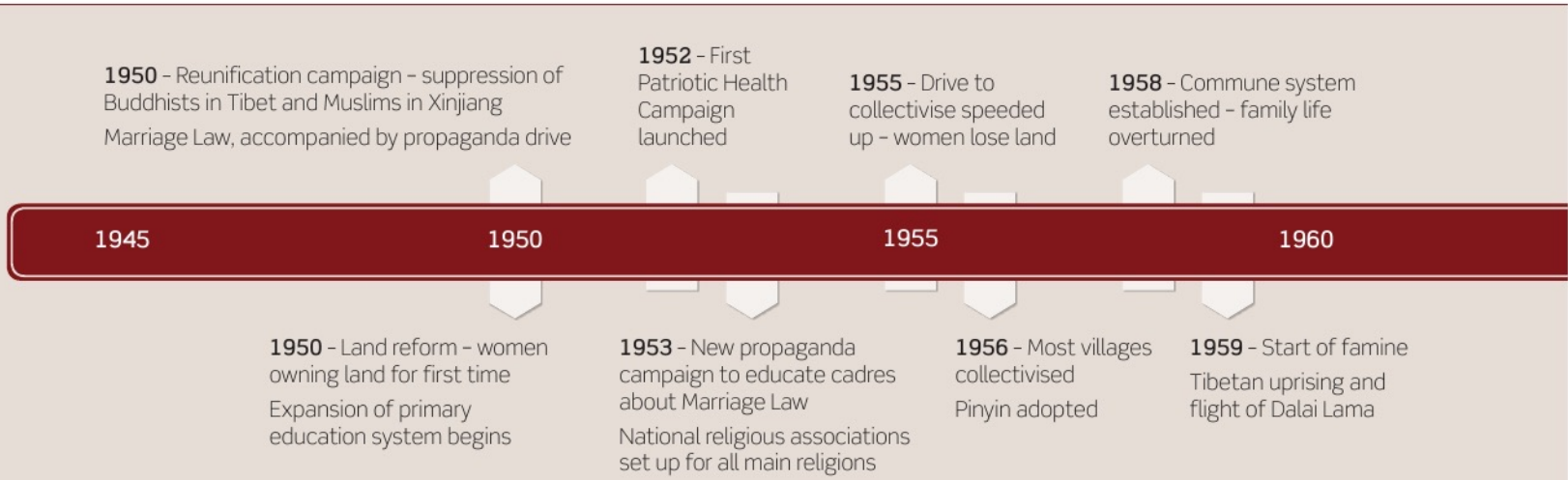
Political changes to the government could be overthrown by a successful revolutionary challenge, but if society itself was remodelled and ordinary people began to act and think like communists, then the changes to China were likely to last much longer. Moreover, Mao was anxious that his legacy should be permanent rather than die with him, so changing society itself would play an essential part in making this possible. Only by getting ordinary people to behave and think like communists could the long-term future of communism be guaranteed.

The main social policies involved removing barriers to gender equality and creating a workforce sufficiently healthy and educated to sustain faster economic growth. However, they also involved destroying links with the past and its alternative value systems, such as **Confucianism**, religious beliefs and a capitalist mindset.

Like the social policies, the cultural changes were meant to create a new approach in place of the old, but in this respect the outcomes were less successful. The old was temporarily destroyed, but nothing new of lasting value was put in its place.

TO WHAT EXTENT DID THE STATUS OF WOMEN CHANGE BETWEEN 1949 AND 1976?

Traditional Chinese society was **patriarchal** and based on Confucian values, a key element of which was obedience. It was the duty of women to obey men, which meant daughters obeyed fathers, wives obeyed their husbands, and widows were even supposed to obey their eldest sons. The harmony of society depended on this. While the 1911 Revolution had led to women receiving more rights, it



had not brought them equality with men, and many old practices were still being followed at the time of the Communist revolution, particularly in rural areas, where change was inevitably slower.

Clause Six of the Communist Common Program of 1949 promised the abolition of restrictions affecting women and affirmed their right to equal treatment with men, in political, economic, cultural, educational and social spheres, and the freedom for both men and women to marry whoever they wanted. The Communists' commitment to eradicating all signs of China's **feudal** past also required destroying the concept of the family as the basic social unit. This was for two reasons:

- family relations embodied the Confucian values of obedience to parents and elders
- the existence of the family encouraged a bourgeois mindset, because it tempted people to attach too much importance to acquiring personal possessions.

KEY TERM

Feudal
In Chinese history, feudal refers to the time under the emperors before 1911. The rich got land in return for serving the emperor. Lower down the hierarchy, peasants without land were allowed to rent it from the landowners in return for working for them. To Communists, 'feudal' was a blanket term symbolising everything wrong with traditional China.

Without doubt, the status of women was significantly raised by the Communists. However, merely passing new laws is not enough to alter deeply ingrained attitudes, so the impact of the reforms was much more limited in practice than it was in theory.

Foot binding

Foot binding involved breaking the toes of young girls and folding them back under the foot, which was then tightly bound. This excruciatingly painful process had to be carried out before the feet were fully grown, and it restricted foot growth to about three inches, which was regarded by men as a sign of beauty and distinction. It was also a convenient way of restricting women's movement. In her book *Wild Swans*, Jung Chang described how her grandmother had her feet bound at the age of two, having a cloth stuck into her mouth to gag her, while the arch of her foot was crushed by a large stone.

Although the practice came under challenge in the 19th century and was outlawed in 1911, it still persisted in some rural areas when the Communists came to power. Their decision to ban it brought it to a speedier end, but it was already on the way out.

The Marriage Law, 1950

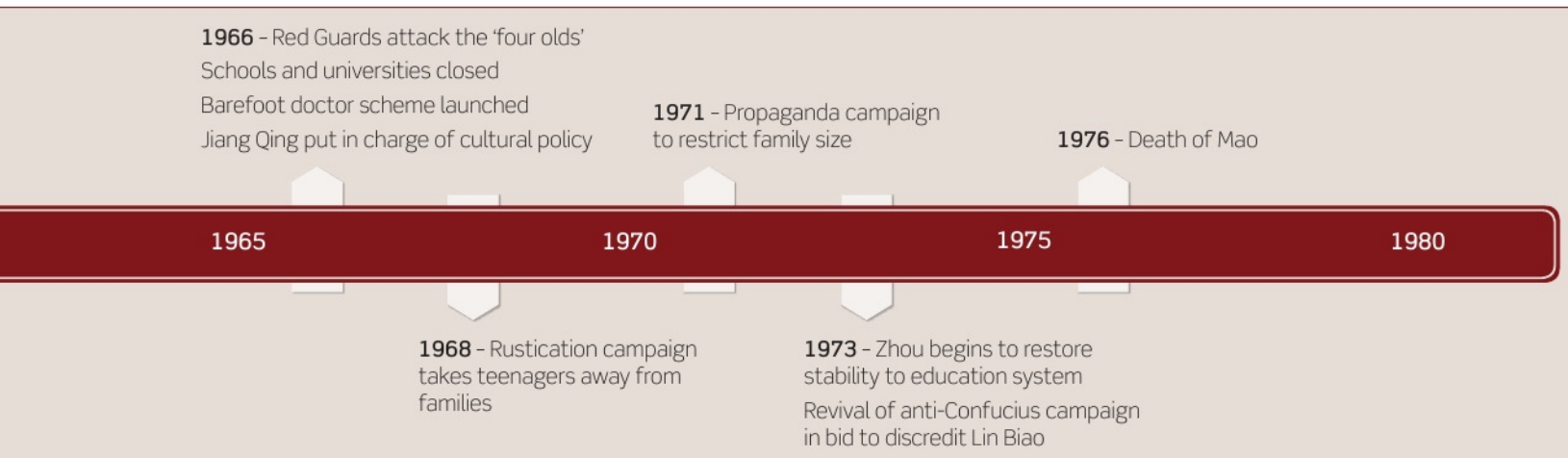
The Communists had experimented with new marriage laws in the Jiangxi and Yanan areas under their control in the 1930s, and the Red Army was instructed to treat women with respect, in marked contrast to women's treatment at the hands of the Japanese invaders after 1937. Once the Communists acquired power over the whole country, the 1950 Marriage Law was one of the first changes they introduced. The new Marriage Law dramatically changed the basis of marriage, from a contractual arrangement between families to something freely entered into by two individuals.

Mao had been personally involved in opposing arranged marriages since his teens. As a 14-year-old, he had rebelled against his father by refusing to go through with his own marriage (which had been arranged with a woman seven years his senior), even though the **bride price** had already been paid. In 1919, he had become embroiled in a bitter controversy in Changsha that had flared up when an unhappy young bride had cut her own throat and bled to death in front of the guests, rather than go through with her wedding.

KEY TERM

Bride price
An amount paid by the family of the groom to the family of the bride, which reflects her perceived value. A dowry is a payment in the opposite direction.

This incident had inspired Mao to write a series of articles condemning arranged marriages and the marriage system in general, which he claimed turned women into slaves. It seems



to have sparked a genuine urge on his part to promote women's rights, and, as his power within the CCP grew, he made it clear that he regarded advancing women's rights as an integral part of the Communist programme. This idealism that first aroused Mao's interest in women's rights was also mixed with practical considerations. Women made up half of the population (he had referred to them as holding up half of the sky), and without at least their tacit support, revolution could not be achieved.

The new law was based on the principle that marriage should be a free choice between both partners and on equal rights for both sexes. The main clauses were as follows.

- The practice of arranged marriages and the payment of dowries to a husband or his family were outlawed.
- Men and women who had been forced to marry previously had the right to divorce their partners.
- All marriages and divorces had to be registered with local government.
- Divorce was to be available on equal terms, except that a man could not divorce his wife if she was pregnant or within a year of her giving birth.
- Children born out of wedlock had equal rights with other children.
- Women retained the right to keep the property they already owned when they married.
- **Concubinage** and **polygamy** were both outlawed.

KEY TERMS

Concubinage
The practice of financially supporting women as mistresses. Although now banned by law, this apparently did not apply to Mao himself, who always had access to a supply of women, officially designated as a PLA dance troupe.

Polygamy
The practice of having multiple wives at the same time.

The importance the Communists attached to the law is shown by the speed with which they tackled the issue, drafting it while the civil war was still going on. In order to enforce it effectively, they deluged the public with a huge propaganda campaign in the press, on the radio and through posters and leaflets. The Party organised thousands of drama troupes to take plays that publicised the new laws around the villages, and Party cadres were urged to check that the law was actually being applied.

SOURCE 1 Government posters publicised the changes made by the 1950 Marriage Law. The caption on this one, which was published in 1953, reads 'In marriage, keep an eye on your own interests, and return radiant after registration.'



However, despite these efforts, the impact of the law was limited by traditional resistance, which was even more pronounced in the Muslim regions of the west. As a result, a second propaganda drive was launched in 1953, but this too was undermined by the outlook of the cadres, many of whom resented the changes. It would take time and a lot more education to shift traditional male attitudes to marriage and the status of women in general.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

The Marriage Law

1 Why do you think the government was so keen to get people to register their marriages?

2 What point do you think the caption of Source 1 was trying to make?

The impact of collectivisation and the communes on women's lives

The land redistribution campaign of 1950 appeared to have advanced the cause of women's emancipation significantly, as it gave women the chance to own land in their own name for the first time. Prior to this, all property dealings had been controlled by men. However, this gain was short-lived, because neither men nor women were allowed to own land privately once the new collectivisation scheme became compulsory a few years later.

In theory, the communes should have been beneficial for women, because it was envisaged that they would provide canteens, laundries and kindergartens to free women from domestic chores, enabling them to concentrate on working on the land or other enterprises in which the communes were engaged. However, since few communes could supply this range of support facilities, the reality was far less liberating. The poem below, written by women in a commune in Hsiancheng county for the propaganda monthly, *China Pictorial*, portrays the idealistic view.

SOURCE 2 This poem, which appeared in the magazine *China Pictorial* in 1958, was written by a woman living in a People's Commune.

Nurseries, kindergartens, tailor shops,
You don't do the cooking,
Or feed the pigs the slops.
Machines make the clothing
And grind the flour.
When you give birth to a baby
It's cared for every hour.
Freed from household drudgery,
Let's produce more by the day,
And drive ahead to communism,
It isn't far away!

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

Communes

1 Explain why a poem such as the one shown in Source 2 might have made a different impact if it had been published in 1962 (it was written in 1958).

2 Why would it have been more effective as propaganda in the cities than in rural communities?

While the introduction of the communes might appear to have been a step towards sexual equality, the actual working conditions in agriculture put women at a serious disadvantage. Typically, they earned fewer **work points** than men because the nature of much agricultural work involved heavy physical labour, and women's productive capacity was frequently lower than men's. Furthermore, the cadres responsible for enforcing discipline usually held traditional attitudes towards sexual equality, and were intolerant of requests for absence from women who were pregnant or during menstruation. This meant women were frequently treated more harshly than men.

KEY TERM

Work points
Awarded according to output. In theory, they were convertible into cash or material rewards, although they became increasingly irrelevant in communes where everyone ate communally and food was shared. Furthermore, there seemed little point earning work points when there was nothing to spend them on, which was often the case.

Women's vulnerability increased during the years of famine (1958–62), when food was even scarcer. As the most productive workers, men could claim more of the food rations. As mothers, women had the invidious task of deciding if they, or their children, were going to be fed first, if at all. Lack of food is often cited as driving more women into prostitution during the famine. It also caused a significant rise in the divorce rate in badly hit areas. When food ran out, either the husband or wife went elsewhere to seek work and maybe a new partner. In Gansu province, for example, the divorce rate rose by 60 percent in the famine years. Wife-selling was another desperate remedy adopted by some to make their resources go further.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

Promoting the communes

Look back to Chapter 2 Source 3 to see what was happening in the communes by the time this poster was published. What does it tell you about the thinking of the government in commissioning propaganda of this sort at the time?

SOURCE 3 Many propaganda posters promoted the benefits of the communes, often idealising the role that women played in farming. This poster of December 1959 was called 'More pigs, more fertiliser, more grain', and gives no hint whatsoever of the scarcities being endured at the time.



Women and the family

Mao and the Communists wanted to destroy traditional family life, since it symbolised the Confucian values that they were committed to overturning. The Communes were part of the attempt to do this, reducing women's roles as mothers and family raisers (in theory, at least). The Party was so determined to destroy the traditional family that in many communes, men and women were made to live in separate quarters, only seeing each other occasionally for conjugal visits.

SOURCE 4 This brief excerpt from the *China Youth Journal* of 1958 describes what the Communist Party wanted to see happening to the family. It represents the official view, and is clearly indulging in wishful thinking.

> The framework of the individual family, which has existed for thousands of years, has been shattered for all time. We must regard the People's Commune as our family and not pay too much attention to the formation of a separate family of our own.

While the removal of family responsibilities should have meant less work for women, the changes brought about by communal life were implemented too suddenly to give women the chance to adjust to them. Their sense of disorientation was increased drastically in the central areas hit hardest by the famine, because here the desperate steps referred to above were necessary: separation, possibly followed by divorce; or sale of the wife to a distant relative where conditions were better, and so on.

Although women suffered badly from the 1958-62 famine, the main victims were the very young and the very old. Children in families that were left without mothers were frequently sold or abandoned, so that there were fewer mouths to feed. Old people who could no longer work were left to fend for themselves.

Some of the fallout from the disruption caused by the famine became apparent later in the 1960s, when conditions improved. There was a stream of court cases in which husbands tried to retrieve wives they had 'lost', who preferred to stay away, having found a better life elsewhere. The Great Leap Forward had certainly disrupted the family, but not in the way that had been planned by the Party.

The family as a unit came under renewed attack during the Cultural Revolution, when it fell into the category of the 'four olds'. Children were told that Mao and the Party were their true parents, to whom they owed loyalty, and children were taught to inform on relatives who clung to old attitudes. This must have had an enormously disruptive effect on family relationships.

SOURCE 5

Anchee Min, *The Cooked Seed* (2013). Anchee Min was born in Shanghai in 1957, so she was only 19 when Mao died. However, the most radical period of the Cultural Revolution was during her primary school years. She emigrated to the USA in 1984, which is where the accounts of her experiences were published. As it was, both her parents lost their professional jobs and had to move, with their four children, into a two-bedroom flat.

My mother was a domineering figure in my life. She threatened to disown me after I was honoured by my elementary school principal for following his order and denouncing my favourite teacher as an American spy. My mother refused to hang my award certificate on the wall, which read MAO'S GOOD CHILD. Other parents would have been thrilled and honoured.

My mother said that the school was turning her children into monsters. She didn't believe that Mao's books should be the only books children read. I wondered if I should report her to the authorities.

Families were disrupted in a different way when the radical phase of the Cultural Revolution ended, as the young Red Guards were sent up to the mountains and down to the countryside. The damage they had been causing to family stability might have ended, but at the expense of uprooting vast numbers of teenagers (12 million between 1968 and 1972) from their families. Those who tried to come back after serving their time in the countryside often found it hard to reintegrate, and have been described by historians as China's 'lost generation'.

Population policy also had an impact on women and the family. For many years, Mao's approach to this was ambiguous. In public, he celebrated the continued growth of the population (from 540 million in 1949 to 940 million by 1976), on the grounds that this demonstrated China's growing world power and justified the mass mobilisation campaigns being used to implement policy. However, by the mid-1950s, worries over resourcing such a huge population were already prompting government officials to discuss ways of restricting population growth. The 1958–62 famine added urgency to the situation, even if the failure of the Great Leap Forward could not be admitted in public. Contraceptives were made widely available in 1962, and female cadres in the Women's Federation were given an increased role in encouraging mothers to restrict the number of children they had. As things calmed down when the most turbulent phase of the Cultural Revolution was over, an administrative framework to support family planning initiatives was gradually put in place. Mao finally clarified policy in 1971, by declaring that the birth rate should be reduced to two percent. A concerted propaganda drive was launched at the same time, pressurising mothers into marrying later and restricting family size to two children. This had some, but limited, effect and was the precursor to the much better-known one-child policy introduced in 1979, three years after Mao's death.

AS Level Exam-Style Question Section A

Study Source 5 before you answer this question.

Why is Source 5 valuable to the historian for an enquiry into the role of young people in the Cultural Revolution? (8 marks)

Tip

Make sure you include the activities of a range of young people, not just those of primary school children.

The nature and extent of change

The most obvious advances gained by women in terms of their rights came about because of the Marriage Law. Arranged marriages were much less common, to the extent that in the first year after the law was passed over a million women used the new divorce system to extricate themselves from arranged marriages that did not suit them. However, while this law, along with the continued decline in Confucian values, reduced the power of parents over their daughters, for many young women the state merely stepped in to take their place: according to historian Rana Mitter, the authority of parents was merely replaced by that of the state in the guise of the head of a woman's work unit.

Women did make rapid advances in terms of taking up opportunities for paid employment, and were entitled to receive the same rates of pay as men, although if these were based on piece work then their output and pay might well be significantly less depending on the nature of the work involved. Although the proportion of women in the overall workforce quadrupled between 1949 and 1976, from 8 to 32 percent, this still represents less than one-third of the workforce, and the opportunities for career progression up management structures were predictably limited by male domination further up the hierarchy. The growth in numbers of working women owed much to the expansion of industry in the First Five-Year Plan (which saw more women taking up jobs in heavy industry) and of the services sector (opening up opportunities in office and clerical work); and to the greater

opportunities for women to follow courses of higher education, although here the proportion of women was even lower than in employment. Higher education was neither free nor compulsory, and the pressure on many women of student age to fulfil domestic roles prevented them from taking advantage of the opportunities to train for careers.

While Communist propaganda frequently featured women's issues and laid great stress on the central importance of gender equality, it depicted women's needs as being the same as those of men: the images used in propaganda posters portrayed women as happy and fulfilled because they could fill roles traditionally occupied by men (soldiers, metal workers, violent Red Guards, etc.). Women who wanted to adopt these male styles of behaviour did feel better off, but there was no opportunity for women to gain more rights while still retaining their feminine roles.

The Cultural Revolution worsened the position of women all-round – the cause of emancipation went backwards because class, rather than gender, issues were considered more important in this period, and their role within the family was undermined by the attacks on the 'four olds'. Meanwhile, women who took up roles as Red Guards found themselves accepted only as long as they exhibited similar levels of violence as their male counterparts, which involved losing their distinct identity as women.

The problem of changing traditional views, especially in the countryside

Resistance to female emancipation was strongest in the inland rural areas, where changes were always slower to arrive and to be accepted. The greatest resistance came in the Muslim provinces of the far west, where arranged marriages formed an integral part of the religious culture. The difficult task of changing these traditional views was left in the hands of the cadres, whose efforts were supported by an assortment of propaganda campaigns, usually in the form of posters.

Aware that male resistance to the Marriage Law was delaying its implementation, the government stepped up its promotional propaganda campaigns in the early 1950s, using the All-China Women's Federation to train cadres in the workings of the new law and to persuade them that it would not lead to chaos. This was only partly successful, however, and male opposition to the Marriage Law remained strong in many areas.

Attitudes to women's pay for agricultural work were also slow to change, especially in northern areas, where women had rarely worked in the fields before the Great Leap Forward. Some of the prejudice against women doing farm work was weakened when they stepped in to fill the labour shortages caused by the mass mobilisation of men on construction projects, but despite this and the achievements of 'model workers' such as **Deng Yulan** in Jehol province, there is plenty of evidence that men and women were still not being rewarded equally for their efforts. This became more obvious when the communes were dismantled and replaced by small collectives where the practice of rewarding rural workers with work points was often restored. Given the heavy nature of much agricultural work, women's output could rarely match that of their male counterparts, but no allowances were made for this.

KEY PERSON

Deng Yulan
Deng's work ethic attracted the attention of the Women's Federation, who were on the lookout for suitable role models who could be used to promote women's rights. Deng won numerous awards and was even invited to Beijing to meet Chairman Mao, but she never received the national propaganda coverage afforded to her male counterparts. Her achievements are only known because historians (in this case, Delia Davin in her book *Woman-work*) have studied the archives searching for female model workers.

EXTEND YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Model workers
China maintains a tradition to this day of using so-called 'model workers' as inspirational role models. The fact that Deng Yulan, a woman, remained relatively unknown compared to the likes of Lei Feng or Wang Jinxi, is testament to the Party's failure to raise the status of women as high as they would have liked, despite poster campaigns to publicise their exploits.

Lei Feng's alleged diaries were publicised in 1963 to promote the importance of selfless dedication to military service; 'Iron Man' Wang Jinxi was feted for breaking China's dependence on oil imports by inspiring his drilling team to endure temperatures of −30 °C in their determination to open up the Daqing oilfield in 1960.

The ***People's Daily***, which acted as the mouthpiece of the Communist Party, condemned gender inequality, and the Party Central Committee felt obliged to reiterate its line that women and men should receive equal pay for equal work, but the emancipated attitudes of Party leaders were not necessarily reflected at grass-roots level.

KEY TERM

People's Daily
As its title suggests, this is a daily newspaper, established in 1946, which is still published today. It performs a similar function to that of *Pravda* in Russia – providing information on government policies from a government viewpoint. Its editorials can be read as statements of government policy.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

Overall gains and losses for women
Compile a balance sheet of gains and losses experienced by women between 1949 and 1976.

HOW SUCCESSFUL WERE THE CHANGES MADE TO EDUCATION AND HEALTH PROVISION?

Mao thought learning should come from experience, and he rejected traditional Chinese education as being too elitist and being too influenced by the West. However, he needed a more literate and educated society for both economic and political reasons – economic progress depended on China producing its own technical specialists, and communist ideas could be spread more quickly among literate people. Health needed to improve for the same reasons – a healthy workforce would be more productive, and a successful health policy would provide major propaganda opportunities for the Communists.

The growth of literacy

When the Communists came to power, the majority of peasants were barely literate; indeed, most were illiterate. By the mid-1950s, a national system of primary education had been set up, with successful results: the national literacy rate rose from 20 percent in 1949 to 50 percent in 1960, and stood at 64 percent in 1964. Progress thereafter was slower because of the Cultural Revolution, and by 1976, the figure had risen only to 70 percent.

However, early progress would have been faster if the government had spent more on primary education (only 6.4 percent of the total budget went on culture and education in 1952) and less on war in Korea, and by 1956, fewer than half the children aged 7–16 were in full-time education. Furthermore, despite Mao's rejection of traditional schooling and the references in the Common Program to reforming the old system in a planned and systematic manner, many elitist elements of the old system still lived on. So-called 'key schools' attracted the best teachers, where students had to pass strict entrance examinations and places were reserved for the children of high-ranking Party and government officials.

The expansion of higher education, and the greater concentration on science and technology in universities reflected the need for more technical experts. Large numbers of students also went to study at Russian universities before the split in 1959, but there were no longer the opportunities to study in the West that had been there before 1949.

Pinyin

Pinyin is a modernised form of phonetic Mandarin, the language of most of China. It was officially adopted in 1956 to assist the spread of literacy, which was being handicapped by the lack of a standardised form of language that everyone could understand. Mandarin presented a problem because its pronunciation varied widely from region to region and it had no alphabet, which meant each word (they were pictures known as ideograms) had to be learned separately. Schemes to introduce a standardised system had been under discussion for several years, but became reality when Zhou Yougang was asked to oversee its introduction by the Education Ministry. He was an economics professor at Shanghai University who had returned from New York because he wanted to contribute his expertise to the creation of a new China.

In Pinyin, all of the sounds of Mandarin were given a particular symbol, which made it much more straightforward to learn and write. It gradually replaced the various other forms of written Chinese and so enabled literacy to spread faster. It also facilitated communication with other countries once this became acceptable.

The collapse of education after 1966

SOURCE 6

This is point 10 of the 16 points laid down by the Party Central Committee in August 1966. It spells out the impact that the Cultural Revolution had on education. The publication of this document was an attempt to extend what had been, up to this point, confined to a student movement, to involve more sections of society so that the Red Guards would become a more formidable force.

One of the most important tasks of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution is to transform the old educational system and the old principles and methods.

The phenomenon of our schools being dominated by bourgeois intellectuals must be completely changed.

In every kind of school we must apply thoroughly the policy advanced by Comrade Mao Tse-Tung of education serving proletarian politics and education being combined with productive labour, so as to enable those receiving an education to develop morally, intellectually, and physically to become labourers with socialist consciousness and culture.

The period of schooling should be shortened. Courses should be fewer and better. The teaching material should be thoroughly transformed, in some cases beginning with simplifying complicated material. While their main task is to study, students should also learn other things... industrial work, farming and military affairs, and take part in the struggles of the Cultural Revolution to criticise the bourgeoisie.

The closure of schools and universities for much of the period between 1966 and 1970 meant that the education of some 130 million young people simply stopped. Even when the Red Guards stopped attacking the education system, they were still not receiving schooling, because they were away in the mountains and country villages after 1968. The damage was felt not just in the short-term. When the schools did reopen, it was difficult to restore belief in the system: teachers had been attacked and ridiculed, the curriculum dismissed as a waste of time and the whole purpose of education undermined. A key part of Zhou's Four Modernisations was to rebuild confidence in the education system, but it was a task that took time. During the Cultural Revolution, the only purpose of education had been to serve the revolution. Learning was not regarded as having any intrinsic use. After the Cultural Revolution, the clock was not simply turned back – there was greater emphasis on practical work and vocational training, with fewer exams to be taken.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

Education

1 Explain why it was in Mao's interests to improve the standard of Chinese education.

2 The government produced scores of highly coloured pictorial posters to promote their education initiatives. Why do you think that was?

3 Identify and explain three factors that slowed down improvements in education.

4 China's relations with other countries had an impact on its higher education policies at different points in time. Pick out three occasions when this happened, and explain what the impact was on each occasion.

A Level Exam-Style Question Section B

How accurate is it to say that the improvements made in education after 1949 were destroyed by the Cultural Revolution? (20 marks)

Tip

As well as explaining what the early improvements in education were, you will need to cover what happened after 1966 in order to reach a judgement. The essay also requires knowledge from Chapter 3 in order to explain the impact of the Cultural Revolution.

Health: the barefoot doctors

During the Cultural Revolution, in a similar way to that in which former Red Guards were dispersed into the countryside, one million medical trainees, known as barefoot doctors, were sent to provide rudimentary medical help to the rural peasantry. Typically, the trainees undertook six months of intensive study, with the emphasis on practical skills, before being dispatched to provide free basic health care. Barefoot doctors promoted simple hygiene, preventative health care and family planning, and treated common diseases.

The scheme had a threefold purpose: medical, ideological and economic. The medical purpose was obvious enough – endemic diseases (notably cholera, typhoid, dysentery, malaria and scarlet fever) and high mortality rates were a chronic feature of rural China.

On an ideological level, it was hoped that exposure to peasant conditions would prevent young medical intellectuals from slipping into the bourgeois mindsets that had made doctors the targets of the earlier 'anti' campaigns. They spent half their time working in agriculture, alongside the people they were looking after, which helped them to win local confidence more readily. Also, because their training was based around practical skills, their education was directly serving the revolutionary cause rather than being seen as learning for its own sake, which was regarded as being of no value.

Finally, it was cheap. Training generally lasted only six months and the doctors' wages (which were roughly half those of a traditionally trained urban doctor) were paid for by the local village government.

The scheme was a great success, both on health grounds and from a propaganda point of view. The basic medical treatment was welcomed by the long-suffering peasantry, and 90 percent of villages were involved in the scheme by 1976. Moreover, the regime could also claim to be fulfilling its promise to make basic health care a universal right. It received significant international attention and served as an inspiration to the World Health Organization, which endorsed similar schemes elsewhere.

SOURCE 7

Joshua Horn was an English surgeon who had become a committed Communist during the economic depression of the 1930s. He had passed briefly through Shanghai in the 1930s, where he had been appalled by the poverty he saw. He took his family with him to live in China from 1954-69 in order to contribute his expertise to the building of a new China. These comments are taken from a pamphlet entitled 'Health Care In China', published by the Anglo-Chinese Educational Institute in 1976.

I would not have believed it possible, that in four months we could learn, together with these young peasants, the rudiments of medicine. I was amazed at how much they learnt. And when I look back, it is clear that very important among the reasons for this was their strong motivation. They felt that an honour and responsibility had been conferred upon them that they must live up to, and so they studied very hard.

Perhaps another reason why they learnt very fast was that we, their teachers, lived with them, and there was nothing separating us, no question of status or anything like that. We all did the work together, carrying the water, chopping the firewood, doing the cooking, cleaning, and everything else. And we were completely at their disposal. The books they used were only mimeographed, but we had written them for this purpose. They were tailor-made for the job, with simple line drawings, and so on.

We in the mobile team used to go around our villages – our parish – at least once or twice a week, and see every village within our area.

ACTIVITY
WRITING

Analysing the language of a primary source

Read Source 7 from Joshua Horn's pamphlet, then:

1. Make a list of words and phrases that he uses that show his attitude towards the Chinese peasant doctors.
2. Write a short paragraph summing up what you consider to be his attitude towards the peasant doctors. Support your view with suitable extracts from the words and phrases in your list.

Successes and failures of health-care reform

Although not specifically promised in the Common Program, the Communists had high hopes of extending health care to everyone. Based on their previous experiences in Jiangxi and Yanan, from 1952 they introduced a series of 'patriotic health movements', propaganda drives led by teams of Party workers who explained to the peasantry the importance of hygiene, and the link between dirt and disease. These can be seen as further examples of mass mobilisation, in this case conducted through street and neighbourhood committees, and supported by copious quantities of colourful propaganda posters, leaflets and film shows. The emphasis was on prevention rather than cure, as there was such a serious shortage of hospital facilities and of trained doctors and nurses. The germ warfare scare (see Chapter 1) during the Korean War was exaggerated partly in order to get the first of these campaigns off the ground.

There was some success in reducing the death rate from waterborne diseases, by encouraging the digging of deeper wells for obtaining drinking water and promoting more careful disposal of human

waste in pits away from homes. The practice of using human waste (also called 'night soil') as a source of fertiliser in the fields was discouraged, since it was a major cause of disease. There was also a concerted campaign to educate the peasantry about the need to control the snails that spread schistosomiasis, a serious abdominal infection responsible for many deaths in the period.

Invoking a spirit of competition proved a useful ploy in stimulating participation in the campaign to eradicate the 'four pests' of flies, mosquitoes, rats and sparrows during the Great Leap Forward. Children especially took up the challenge, although the eventual substitution of bed bugs for sparrows (see Chapter 2) met with less enthusiasm. However, the damage caused to the ecological balance by the sparrowcide outweighed any other benefits of the campaign.

In terms of hospital treatment for the sick, facilities were limited. Urban workers in large industrial enterprises or SOEs had the best access to treatment. In rural areas, county hospitals were staffed by trained doctors, but most care was administered at a lower level through out-patient care provided by village health centres.

Even though government spending on health was never sufficient to fulfil the hopes of the Party, overall there were significant improvements in health over the period, with life expectancy rising from 41 years in 1950 to 62 by 1970, and infant mortality rates falling.

SOURCE 8 One of the many public health posters aiming to educate people about the links between dirt and disease. This was instructing people in practical steps to take in order to eradicate pests, and was published in 1952.



ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

Health

1 Why was it in Mao's interests to improve the standard of health care in China?

2 Which aspect of the barefoot doctor scheme do you consider to have been the most successful, and why?

3 What are the main criticisms that could be made of the scheme?

4 Draw up a chart to summarise the successes and failures of health policy, making it clear why you consider each feature to be either a success or a failure.

5 Study the poster carefully and make a list of the problems and the steps that were recommended to deal with each one.

AS Level Exam-Style Question Section B

To what extent were Mao's social policies successful between 1950 and 1976? (20 marks)

Tip

Be careful to stick to social policies (policies targeting specific groups in society – women, young people, religious minorities and so on). Good answers will establish at the outset how 'success' can be judged.

WHY DID THE COMMUNISTS ATTEMPT TO CHANGE CHINESE CULTURE?

Culture served a clear political purpose to Mao. He thought it was vital to impose a new **proletarian** culture on China in order to protect the gains made in the revolution. Only by changing the way that people lived their daily lives (how they expressed themselves, how they behaved and how they spent their leisure time) could its long-term future be guaranteed. The writers, artists and musicians whose work helped to shape culture should be ordinary people, and their work should reflect ordinary people's concerns.

KEY TERM

Proletarian
The proletariat, in Marxist vocabulary, are the non-property-owning working class who sell their labour to the bourgeoisie in order to survive. Proletarian culture would be produced by the proletariat, for the proletariat, rather than by an elite class of intellectuals for their own consumption.

When the transition to communism was finally completed, all class differences would disappear anyway, but China was regarded as being still in a transitional stage on the way to this.

For the residents of Beijing, the creation of the Ten Great Buildings and remodelling of Tiananmen Square in time for the tenth anniversary of the Communist accession to power were clear reminders of the political purpose behind cultural change. In the space of less than a year, Tiananmen Square was levelled and extended to accommodate over 500,000 people in a huge open space (deliberately made larger than Red Square in Moscow) with no trees or benches to get in the way of people attending rallies. On the west side, the Great Hall of the People was built to accommodate the National People's Congress, and on the eastern side was the Revolutionary History Museum.

EXTEND YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Ten Great Buildings
These buildings were designed to showcase the 'new' China, and were all rapidly constructed in 1958–59, in order to be ready for the tenth anniversary celebrations on 1 October 1959. They included Beijing's new railway station, the Cultural Palace of Nationalities, the Workers' Stadium and several state hotels and guesthouses. The architectural style reflected the influence of the Soviet advisers, as well as traditional Chinese architecture.

Attacks on traditional culture in towns and the countryside

Imposing the new proletarian culture first required the destruction of old attitudes rooted in the past. Ever since May 1919, intellectuals had regarded the main obstacle to progress to be Confucian culture, which was embedded in the land tenure system and the patriarchal nature of society.

EXTEND YOUR KNOWLEDGE

May 1919
The May Fourth Movement of 1919 was so called because of the demonstrations held on that day against the terms of the Treaty of Versailles, which had awarded Germany's former colonies in China to Japan. However, the movement embraced much broader aims around the modernisation of China and became the driving force behind demands for change over the following decades.

The Land Reform of 1950 dealt a major blow to these traditional values, and much subsequent Communist propaganda was aimed at stressing how much 1949 was a fresh start, requiring totally different attitudes. The power of the landowners had been broken, and henceforth, peasants were working collectively towards a brighter future, where their interests would be safeguarded by the state.

Before the Cultural Revolution heralded an intensive onslaught on cultural values, the main aim of Communist policy was to undermine traditional peasant customs and to continue to discredit Confucianism.

Collectives, and then the communes, with their regimentation of daily life, gave the Party much more control of the peasantry's time, providing the ideal opportunity to put a stop to the social customs and rituals to which the peasants were accustomed. In their leisure time, peasants found themselves attending political meetings where the new values were reinforced, and watching shows and propaganda films put on by **agit-prop touring groups**, who sold them the new ideas in an entertaining way.

KEY TERM

Agit-prop touring groups
As in Soviet Russia, agit-prop (short for agitation propaganda) groups put on easily understood plays, where the forces of good (the peasants and workers) triumphed over traditional forces of evil (landlords or religious figures). Audience participation, jeering the bad and cheering the good, was encouraged. It was pantomime for adults.

However, in June 1966, a new tone was set by Chen Boda's editorial in the *People's Daily*, which urged the Red Guards to 'sweep away the monsters and demons' – a frequently repeated phrase that covered anyone whose occupation or attitudes reflected privilege and therefore made them a legitimate target. During the following two years, the Red Guards became a law unto themselves, as they hunted down the 'four olds'. Their victims included an arbitrary range of the people holding onto 'old' values and the objects that represented them. This latter task involved closing museums and libraries, burning or pulping vast numbers of books, and destroying musical instruments, manuscripts, paintings and other works of art (see Chapter 3 for details).

It was in order to channel this destruction more effectively, and then to impose the new proletarian culture that was to take its place, that Mao put his wife, Jiang Qing, in charge of cultural policy.

SOURCE 9

From Nien Cheng, *Life and Death in Shanghai* (1987). This comes from Cheng's account of the day the Red Guards ransacked her house to destroy any evidence of the 'four olds'. She was the widow of a former manager at Shell, and lived with her daughter in a very comfortable house, where she still employed two servants, who also had rooms in the house. She had been expecting a visit for some time. It came on 3 July 1966.

The Red Guards pushed open the front door and entered the house. There were between thirty and forty senior high school students, aged between fifteen and twenty, led by two men and one woman much older. Although they all wore the arm bands of the Red Guards, I thought the three older people were the teachers who generally accompanied them when they looted private homes.

The lead Red Guard, a gangling youth with angry eyes, stepped forward and said to me, 'we are the Red Guards. We have come to take revolutionary action against you!' Though I knew I was doing something futile, I held up the copy of the Constitution and said calmly 'It's against the Constitution of the People's Republic of China to enter a private house without a search warrant.'

The young man snatched the document out of my hand and threw it on the floor. With his eyes blazing, he said, 'the Constitution is abolished. It was a document written by the Revisionists within the Communist Party. We recognise only the teachings of our Great Leader Chairman Mao.'

A girl came within a few inches of where I stood. She shook her fist in front of my nose and spat on the floor. Another young man used a stick to smash the mirror hanging over the chest facing the front door. Then he took from another Red Guard a small blackboard which he hung up on a hook. On it was written a quotation from Mao. It said, 'When the enemies with guns are annihilated, the enemies without guns still remain.' The Red Guards read the quotation aloud as if taking a solemn oath. Afterwards, they told me to read it. Then one of them shouted to me, 'an enemy without a gun! That's what you are. Hand over the keys!'

I placed my bunch of keys on the chest amidst the fragments of glass. One of them picked them up. All the Red Guards dispersed into various parts of the house. A girl pushed me into the dining room and locked the door.

THINKING HISTORICALLY Cause and consequence (6a)

Seeing things differently

Different times and different places have a different set of ideas. Beliefs about how the world works, how human societies should be governed or the best way to achieve economic prosperity, can all be radically different from our own. It is important for the historian to take into account these different attitudes and be aware of the dangers of judging them against modern ideas.

The account in Source 9 describes a visit by the Red Guards. It goes on to describe how the author, having persuaded the students to let her out to visit the bathroom, tried to dissuade them from smashing various valuable antiques, suggesting they might sell them in Hong Kong to raise funds for their campaign to export the revolution abroad. Although this ploy was successful, it did not stop them smashing her collection of classical records. When she tried to argue that they were not 'the forbidden music of our dance halls and night clubs', she was told: 'You live in the past. Don't you know that our Great Leader has said that western music of any kind is decadent? Do the peasants and workers want Chopin, Mozart, Beethoven or Tchaikovsky? Of course not! We are going to compose our own proletarian music.'

Answer the following questions:

1 How would you describe the attitudes being shown by the Red Guards in this extract?

2 Why do you think they held these attitudes? (Think about longer-term as well as short-term reasons.)

3 How do you think it would have affected the students' attitudes if they had known that they would be sent up to the mountains and down to the countryside later in the year?

4 Are there any other attitudes towards things that people held in China in this period that strike you as very different from your own ways of seeing things?

5 How important is it for historians to deal with events in the context of the beliefs and values of people in the past, as well as seeing them as part of a greater pattern?

The role of Jiang Qing and the imposition of revolutionary art and culture

Interviewed after her arrest following Mao's death, Jiang Qing defended her behaviour by describing herself to the Public Prosecutor as 'Chairman Mao's dog – whoever he asked me to bite, I bit'. However, while she may not have initiated policy, she certainly carried it out ruthlessly. Believing that her previous career as an actress gave her a special insight into the performing arts, and supported by her radical allies in the CCRG, Jiang Qing set about her task of purifying Chinese culture, working closely with the Minister of Culture and a range of experienced singers, dancers and composers. A rigid form of censorship was established which prevented any work (across the entire field of the arts) from appearing in public until it had satisfied her criteria of cultural purity. While this led to strict control, it also resulted in some inconsistencies to accommodate her own arbitrary preferences. For example, while most Western cultural influences were banned because of their bourgeois origins, piano music and oil paintings were allowed because they suited her personal taste.

Only works that related to contemporary Chinese themes were permitted, so traditional stories had to be updated and put into a modern context. Creative artists unwilling to produce work that served the revolution found themselves at best unemployed, at worst sent for re-education to a labour camp.

Jiang Qing also took advantage of her power over culture to pursue personal vendettas against her many enemies from the past, including actresses who had won roles ahead of her in the 1930s and those who knew compromising details of her earlier career.

The main result of Jiang's control was to completely stifle creativity. In an effort to fill the void, and to satisfy her desire to dominate artistic output herself, she commissioned a set of eight opera ballets, each of which symbolised the triumph of the heroic workers over their class oppressors. Most of these involved reworking traditional stories into a modern setting to give them contemporary relevance. They were the only form of theatrical entertainment available and became very well known beyond Beijing, because they were broadcast so frequently over the radio and were much used in schools.

SOURCE 10 Anchee Min, *Red Azalea* (2006). This was the first part of her memoir (*The Cooked Seed* was the second – see Source 5), recalling her youth as a keen teenage Red Guard, before being rusticated along with thousands of other young people.

I became an opera fan. There were not many forms of entertainment. The word 'entertainment' was considered a dirty bourgeois word. The opera was something else. It was a proletarian statement. The revolutionary operas created by Madam Mao. To love or not to love the operas was a serious political attitude. It meant to be or not to be a revolutionary. The operas were taught on radio and in school, and were promoted by the neighbourhood organizations. For ten years. The same operas. I listened to the operas when I ate, walked and slept. I grew up with the operas. I decorated the porch with posters of my favourite opera heroines. I sang the operas wherever I went. My mother heard me singing in my dreams; she said that I was preserved by the operas. It was true. I could not go on a day without listening to the operas. I pasted my ear close to the radio, figuring out the singer's breaths. I imitated her. The aria was called 'I won't quit the battle until all the beasts are killed.' It was sung by Iron Plum a teenage character in an opera called *The Red Lantern*. I would not stop singing the aria until my vocal cords hurt. My father could not bear my loud wailing with the radio; he always yelled, 'Are you hanging yourself in the kitchen?'

AS Level Exam-Style Question Section A

Study Source 10 before you answer this question.

How much weight do you give the evidence of Source 10 for an enquiry into the impact of Jiang Qing's control of Chinese culture between 1966 and 1976?

Explain your answer using the source, the information about it and your own knowledge of the historical context. (12 marks)

Tip

You will need to extend the range of your answer to go beyond opera, which is the focus of the source.

These model works were played out before huge audiences, who dared not express anything but approval. US President Nixon recalled not looking forward to going to see the *Red Detachment of Women* during his visit in 1972, but being pleasantly surprised by its 'dazzling technical virtuosity'

even if the story was 'emotionally and dramatically superficial'. Party secretary Deng Xiaoping was less complimentary, arguing that people wanted entertainment and variety, not battlefield scenes, but Jiang had her revenge when he was purged, not once, but twice.

Many of the eight model works were made into feature films, which were the main offerings of cinemas during the period 1966–73. It has been calculated that, by 1974, the film of the opera *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy* had received 7.3 billion viewings, which equates to seven viewings by every Chinese person. This probably owes more to the lack of choice (no other full-length films were made and foreign films were banned) than to its popularity, but the figure also reflects the growth of rural projection units taking films around the countryside.

SOURCE 11

Anchee Min, *The Cooked Seed* (2013). The events she is referring to occurred in 1976, shortly before Mao's death. Madame Mao is Jiang Qing.

I was handpicked by Madame Mao's talent scouts while hoeing weeds in a cotton field. Like a package, I was shipped to the Shanghai Film Studio. I was to be trained to play a leading role in Madame Mao's propaganda movies, although I knew nothing about acting. I was chosen only because my looks matched Madame Mao's image of a proletarian heroine. I had a weather-beaten face and a muscled body capable of carrying hundreds of pounds of manure. I froze the moment I heard the sound of a camera rolling, but I tried hard so that I could escape the labour camp.

It was not my fault that Madame Mao picked me. She wanted 'a piece of white paper on which to paint any colour she liked'. All I did was follow orders. I was even taught how to drink water 'in the proletarian style' at the Shanghai Film studio.

'No, you're drinking the water incorrectly, Comrade Min,' my instructor yelled. Your pinkie[*] is up, and that's Miss Bourgeois. You must grab the cup, gulp the water down in one breath, and wipe your mouth with both of your sleeves!'

I had no talent for acting. The camera assistant had to pin the corner of my costume down to hide my trembling. My back was soaked with sweat at the sound of 'Action!' I kept picturing myself being shipped back to the labour camp.

[*pinkie means little finger]

SOURCE 12

From Nien Cheng, *Life and Death in Shanghai* (1987). Here she is writing about her daughter, Meiping, who had already started work as a film actress when the Cultural Revolution took off. Because her work was seen as serving the revolution, she initially avoided being subjected to struggle sessions and jailed like her mother, but she was arrested as a 'class enemy' in 1967 and murdered by the Red Guards that year.

It had been somewhat of a surprise when my daughter told me that two well-known film actresses, currently teachers at the new Film School of Shanghai, had approached her to suggest that she try for the entrance examination as a specially selected 'talent' to enrol in the school. She said they had sent talent scouts all over the country to select students for the examination. 'There is bound to be a big response because everybody wants to live in Shanghai', she said.

So, she went to the Film School. Three years later she graduated and was given a job with the Film Studio, which was run by the Ministry of Culture. The acting profession was glamorous even in Communist China, but those who worked in it did not receive higher pay than factory workers. The function of an actress was to bring entertainment to the masses, so besides taking part in films, she often gave performances in factories, rural communes, coal-mines and oilfields, travelling far and wide with her unit all over China.

A Level Exam-Style Question Section A

Study Sources 11 and 12 before you answer this question.

How far could the historian make use of Sources 11 and 12 together to investigate Jiang Qing's efforts to create a new style of proletarian culture during the period 1966–76?

Explain your answer using both sources, the information given about them and your own knowledge of the historical context. (20 marks)

Tip

The sources show similarities and differences; also, you will need to widen your answer to include a wider range than the cinema, and pay attention to the dates.

Another area that received special attention was painting. The peasant women in Huxian, in Shaanxi province, had already been trained by the Party to produce wall paintings promoting the Great Leap Forward, and during the Cultural Revolution, ex-professional artists were sent to coach them further in order to demonstrate that proletarian art had become a reality. They even attracted international attention as a result of being sent to exhibit their work in Paris in 1975, but such examples merely emphasise how unrealistic the cultural policies were. The reality was that the quality and quantity of creative artistic output fell as a result of Jiang Qing's control, and the lack of freedom of expression meant lack of creativity, because the only work deemed acceptable was formulaic and predictable.

SOURCE 13 The production brigade's reading room, 1975. An example of the work of one of the Huxian peasant painters, Zhao Kunhan.



ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

What image of proletarian culture is Source 13 trying to promote?

Jiang retained her stranglehold over the arts until the death of Mao, by which time it had become clear that, despite her efforts, no substantial body of new proletarian art had developed to replace that which had been destroyed. Literature as an art form seems to have almost disappeared in the period, which saw a mere 124 novels published, as writers were frightened into inactivity by fear of falling foul of the censors. Poet Yan Yen commented that the cultural trademark of his generation was simply the lack of culture as a result of Jiang's control.

EXTRACT 1 Taken from Chang and Halliday, *Mao: The Unknown Story* (2006). They take a very negative view of Mao and his close associates.

In the annihilation of culture, Madame Mao played a key role as her husband's police chief for this field. She made sure there was no resurrection of culture for the rest of Mao's life. Old books remained banned, and among the handful of new books of general interest that were published, all of them sported Mao's quotations in bold, on every other page. There were a few paintings and some songs around, but they all served propaganda purposes, and eulogised Mao. Virtually the only performing arts allowed were eight 'revolutionary model shows', and a few films that Madame Mao had a hand in producing. China became a cultural desert.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

Jiang Qing and culture

1 Why do you think Mao did not just leave culture alone?

2 Why do you think he chose Jiang Qing to fill that particular role?

3 In what respects was she a poor choice?

4 Look carefully at the peasant painting (Source 13). Make a list of the activities going on in the reading room and explain how the artist attempts to portray the cultural changes in a positive light.

5 Explain how the communes assisted the Party in enforcing cultural policies.

HOW DID THE COMMUNISTS SEEK TO DESTROY THE PRACTICE OF RELIGION?

Although Article 5 of the Common Program stated that there would be freedom of religion, it must have been clear that there would be no long-term future for organised religions inside China. Communists viewed religion as a device used by the bourgeoisie to give false hope of a better future to the masses, so that they would accept the hard grind of their daily lives without complaint. Mao was particularly vocal in his criticisms of the Christian missionaries in China, whom he saw as a reminder of the West's attempt to colonise China in the 19th century.

The official view was that, since the workers had thrown off their oppressors, there was no longer any need for religions to exist. Following the Soviet model, the authorities set up national religious associations for each of the main religions, whereby they were allowed to continue in existence, provided they surrendered any semblance of independence to the state.

Attacks on Buddhism, Confucianism, Christianity, Islam and ancestor worship

Buddhism

Buddhism had been practised in China for well over 1,000 years, and had been a significant influence on the development of culture and philosophy in the areas where it had become established.

Most of China's Buddhists lived in Tibet, and it was for strategic rather than ideological reasons that Buddhism came under such severe attack. Situated on the western fringes of China, on the border with India (with whom China had perennial frontier disputes), Tibet had been self-governing since 1913, and had announced its intention to stay autonomous. In purely ideological terms, Buddhism shared some common ground with communism, since both were atheistic, and both deplored the possession of material goods. In fact, the Dalai Lama had shown some initial sympathy with the Communists until the brutal suppression of his people began. However, the contemplative nature of Buddhism made its adherents potentially more difficult to mobilise in mass activity, and its pacifist outlook obviously clashed with the priorities of the leadership. Above all, though, the Communists felt they could not afford to allow such a potentially vulnerable buffer zone to remain outside their control, fearing that the mixture of religion and nationalism might prove too dangerous if not checked.

Tibet's vain attempt to resist Chinese conquest in the 1950 reunification campaign was followed by a systematic attempt by the Chinese to destroy Tibetan religion and culture. Lamaism, the Tibetan form of Buddhism, was banned from being practised in public, and the use of the Tibetan language was replaced by Mandarin. Rather than destroying Tibetan resistance, these policies pushed it underground, from where it emerged in 1959 in the form of a mass uprising against Chinese rule. Beijing's response was predictably tough, sending in the PLA to suppress demonstrations, arrest the protestors and execute the leaders. Buddhists were particularly targeted – priests and nuns were dragged from their monasteries and beaten, and many monasteries were turned into army barracks or administrative buildings. Those monasteries that were allowed to remain open had to accept state control and come under the control of the Chinese Buddhist Association.

Such was the severity of the clampdown that the Dalai Lama fled to sanctuary in northern India, from where he continues to publicise the plight of the Tibetan people to the outside world.

The unfortunate plight of the Tibetans did not end with the savage repression of the 1959 uprising. By totally restructuring the farming system during the Great Leap Forward, the Chinese government appears to have been deliberately extending the famine into Tibet, where starvation caused the deaths of a quarter of the entire population – the highest proportion in any region. Nor did it end with the famine. In the Cultural Revolution, some 6,000 monasteries were destroyed in Tibet, and thousands were killed by Red Guards during the most radical period of 1966–68.

Clearly Mao's brutal policies were successful in destroying many of the outward signs of Buddhism, particularly in Tibet. In the political sense that Tibet has been preserved as a security buffer zone, the policies have been successful. However, their limitations are demonstrated by continued need for periodic clampdowns and the fact that Buddhism remains China's most widely practised religion today.

Confucianism

Confucian ideas had dominated Chinese philosophy for 2,500 years. The Confucian approach to life aims to make society as harmonious as possible, through showing respect for legitimate authority. Since the early years of the 20th century, the Confucian approach had come under consistent attack from intellectuals, who blamed it for China's weaknesses, attacks that were stepped up by the Communists. While Confucianism is not a religion in the strict sense (having no god, church or clergy, nor concern with the afterlife), its stress on the upholding of traditional authority, particularly through the family, clashed directly with communist values.

Communist propaganda denounced Confucian attitudes as representing all that was bad about China's past, and during the Cultural Revolution, Beijing students travelled out by train in order to ransack the monuments in Confucius' home town of Qufu. 'Confucius and Co.' became a convenient label to pin on any undesirable remnant of Chinese culture and was widely used in the Cultural Revolution. When Lin Biao was being posthumously discredited in 1973, Jiang Qing revived the anti-Confucius campaign by portraying Lin as a contemporary version of Confucius.

In a sense Confucianism was an easy target to attack as its values had been widely criticised since the republic was first set up in 1911, and were blamed by many for holding back the modernisation of China. However, some Confucian values surrounding the family and social harmony are simply too deeply ingrained to be completely eradicated, and this has prompted discussion among Mao's successors of the extent to which communism and Confucianism could be considered compatible.

Christianity and Islam

Christian and Islamic values were clearly incompatible with Marxism, and both came under attack from the Communists.

Christianity had established a foothold in China by the 19th century, due to the activities of Protestant and Catholic missionaries, but they had come under attack from the Communists even before the civil war was over. After 1949, fear of arrest and accusations of espionage quickly drove most Protestant missionaries out of the country. Some Catholics followed, but the Pope's insistence that they stay in their posts put them in an awkward position. In Source 14 Zhang Yinxian, a nun in Yunnan, recalls her ordeal when her church was closed down in 1951.

SOURCE 14 From Liao Yiwu's interview with Sister Zhang Yinxian, in *God is Red* (2011). The interview took place in 2008, when Zhang was over 100 years old, but in very good health. Liao Yiwu is a Chinese author, who was jailed after criticising the Tiananmen Square massacre of 1989, and whose books are banned in mainland China. He now lives in Germany.

> The chapel was sealed and no one was allowed to enter. After the foreigners left, everyone at the church had to go through a political review process. Both laity and clergy were scared and quit in droves. They answered the government's call and went home to farm. Some openly renounced the church. They said, 'I will listen to the words of Chairman Mao and cut off all my ties with the Catholic Church which enslaves people.'
>
> I can never forget 1952, the year when the church was left empty. It used to be so glorious. Overnight, everything was gone. Rats took over the place. We used to have four hundred people working at the church. Only three were left—me, my aunt, and Bishop Liu Hanchen. We were ordered out. Bishop Liu argued and refused to leave. 'The church is our home and we don't have anywhere to go.'
>
> Initially, they allowed us to stay. At the end of the year members of the local militia came with guns and took us to a village at the foot of Cangshan Mountain. Local officials held a public meeting, announcing that we would be put under the supervision of villagers there. They ordered us to engage in physical labour and reform our thinking.

EXTEND YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Tiananmen Square massacre (1989)
This took place when the government moved tanks into the square to forcibly remove pro-democracy demonstrators, who had been camping out there peacefully for seven weeks. Estimates of the death toll vary from a few hundred to several thousand.

Many church buildings were closed down and their property confiscated, while propaganda constantly attacked the behaviour of the Church as an institution. However, Mao and the authorities realised that reaching some form of accommodation with the Christians would make the Communists appear tolerant without sacrificing any power. Instead of completely eradicating Christianity, so-called 'patriotic churches' were allowed to continue to function. Such churches lost all independence, the state having the right to appoint the clergy and to dictate doctrine. The Protestant Church came under the authority of the Three Self Patriotic Movement in 1953, with some Catholics reluctantly following suit in 1957. The Vatican, however, condemned the initiative, threatening to excommunicate any clergyman appointed by the Chinese state. Both Protestant and Catholic Churches were therefore seriously weakened by communist persecution, and continue to exist only in a much reduced capacity.

Persecution predictably escalated during the Cultural Revolution, when religion was identified as one of the 'four olds'. The wave of arrests of clergy and ban on public worship that followed led to renewed international criticism, to which the government was impervious.

Muslims were persecuted on both ideological and strategic grounds. Ideologically, Islam offered a set of values that ran counter to the atheistic communist state, particularly among conservative Muslims who resisted gender equality. Strategically, the north-western provinces of Xinjiang, Gansu and Qinghai, where most of the Muslims lived, were a security risk. They lay adjacent to powerful Muslim states to the west and were potentially within the grasp of the Soviet Union, which was interested in their oil and gas reserves. Xinjiang was home to the Uighur, Kazakh, Hui and Kirghiz peoples, all of whom resented Chinese rule, which is why it had received special attention from the PLA in the reunification campaigns of 1950. As in Tibet, military conquest had been followed up by the settling of large numbers of Han Chinese, in an attempt to dilute local identity and reduce the likelihood of a separatist movement.

As with the other religions, the authorities tried to mask the extent of persecution by setting up a national association – in this case the Chinese Islamic Association. However, many mosques were closed, and during the Cultural Revolution, many more were vandalised, while Muslim leaders were frequently humiliated in public and subjected to struggle sessions. Although there has been a modest revival of Islam since 1976, the Uighur Muslims continue to suffer restrictions because of their geographical location on the north-west border.

Ancestor worship

Ancestor worship was deeply rooted in China. It was believed that there was a reciprocal relationship between the living and the dead. It was the duty of the living to sustain the spirits of the dead by

maintaining their graves and setting up ancestral temples; in return, the dead would intercede on behalf of the living to bring them good fortune. Neglecting the dead risked creating 'hungry ghosts', who would seek vengeance on the living. It had also been a key element of Confucianism.

SOURCE 15 Li Zhisui, *The Private Life of Chairman Mao* (1996). Li, as Mao's personal doctor, spent much time close to Mao. Here he is recalling a trip Mao took in June 1959, to see for himself how the Great Leap Forward was progressing in the area where his parents had lived. Mao's reactions to what he saw underline how deeply entrenched traditional attitudes were in his own mind. The book was written in the early 1990s, after Li had left for the USA.

> In the middle of a small pine grove, Mao stopped before a burial mound. It was only when he bowed from the waist in the traditional manner of respect that I realised we were standing before his parents' grave. One of the security officers quickly gathered a bunch of wildflowers. Mao placed them on the grave and bowed three times again. The rest of his entourage bowed too.
>
> We continued walking in the direction of the Mao clan ancestral hall. Mao stopped, puzzled, looking for something. We were standing on the spot where the Buddhist shrine Mao had referred to so often once stood – the shrine his mother used to visit when he was sick, where she burned incense and fed the ashes to her son, certain of their curative powers. The tiny shrine, like the tombstone, had disappeared, torn down only months before with the establishment of the commune. The bricks were needed to build the backyard steel furnaces, and the wood had been used as fuel.
>
> Mao had fallen silent. The destruction of the shrine had saddened him. 'It should have been left alone', he said. 'The shrine could lift people's spirits, give them hope. People need this kind of help and encouragement.'

In public, the Communists condemned ancestor worship as a superstition that was no longer acceptable in the new China, as part of their wider policy to reduce the importance of the family and to make people look to the future rather than the past. Once the communes were in operation, controlling such behaviour was easier, but it was never eradicated, because it was so deeply entrenched, and many communes were dismantled anyway in the 1960s. One reason for the government's harsh reaction to the outpouring of grief after Zhou Enlai's death in 1976 was because it smacked of a revival of ancestor worship. Like some aspects of Confucian beliefs, ancestor worship was far too deeply entrenched to be eradicated in a short time, and many of the practices associated with it continue to be observed.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

Religious persecution

1 Make a copy of the table below and complete it, using as much detail as possible. In the final column, award a mark out of ten, with ten being for total eradication.

	Reasons for attack	How attacked	Factors making persecution easier	Factors making persecution harder	Effectiveness
Buddhism					
Christianity					
Islam					
Confucianism					
Ancestor worship					

2 Of the five religions, which do you think was most damaged, and why that one?

3 Overall, why do you think the campaigns against religion were relatively unsuccessful?

THINKING HISTORICALLY Change (6a)

Separately and together

Below are some of the different types of history that historians may identify:

political; religious; cultural; social; economic; military.

These are thematic histories, where a historian focuses on a particular aspect of change. For example, an economic history of China would focus on the attempts to modernise agriculture and industry, whereas a political history would focus on how the rulers established and maintained their grip on power.

Work in groups:

1 Write a definition for each of the six types of history listed above.

Listed below are six important events from our period of Chinese history, referred to in this chapter.

1950 – the campaign to suppress Buddhism in Tibet got under way

1950–53 – the Korean War

1958 – the Great Leap Forward began

1966–76 – Jiang Qing was in charge of directing cultural policy

1966 – the barefoot doctors campaign was launched

1968 – the rustication of the Red Guards began

Take each in turn:

2 Decide which thematic category is most appropriate to put each event in, and explain why it belongs there.

3 Explain which other category (or categories) each could also belong to.

4 Agree on one statement attacking the idea of 'thematic history' as a way of understanding the past.

5 Write down three statements justifying it as a way of looking at the past. Explain which you think is the strongest defence of it.

6 Explain why 'thematic history' occurs.

Conclusion

After Stalin's death in 1953, Mao assessed his achievement in Russia as having been 70 percent correct and 30 percent mistaken. In 1981, five years after Mao's death, the Central Committee of the CCP assessed Mao in broadly similar terms, though without quoting exact statistics. The Committee produced a long evaluation of Mao's career, applauding his contribution to the Chinese revolution, but acknowledging that grave mistakes had been made during the Cultural Revolution. However, Deng, who was leader by this time, was careful to avoid treating Mao with the disrespect with which Khrushchev had treated Stalin in 1956, since to criticise Mao too extensively would only raise doubts about his own legitimacy to rule.

One major difficulty for historians in weighing up Mao's impact is separating the enormous human suffering caused by his revolution from its actual achievements, which were undoubtedly significant. Another significant factor is that, as time passes and memories of the worst excesses of the period fade, revisionist views inevitably see the revolution in a more positive light. Perhaps it is indicative of this that the 2007 monument at Changsha portrays Mao as a young man of 32, rather than as the elder statesman of traditional propaganda images (see the Introduction).

The achievements of the revolution were greatest in terms of political power, whereby Mao bequeathed long-term benefits to both the Communist Party and the nation as a whole. The most obvious benefit to the Party was that Mao had ensured that their grip on power would remain unchallenged, thanks to the new constitutional arrangements and the unwavering loyalty of the army. Democratic centralism had become entrenched as the basis of government, and the Politburo lay at the very heart of this, thereby guaranteeing that Communist Party leaders would continue to control the levers of power. The PLA stood behind them to reinforce this, intervening as and when necessary. While followers of alternative political views had been briefly tolerated during the initial transitional period, they were silenced by the terror of 1950–51 and the frequent anti-rightist campaigns thereafter.

As far as the nation was concerned, Mao had introduced effective central government to China for the first time in over a century. China became an organised political unit under a strong government in Beijing, and was no longer being torn apart by warring factions or foreign invaders, as it had been earlier in the century. Nor was it being controlled by colonial powers, as it had been under the emperors. This political stability was an essential prerequisite for the rapid economic growth that began during the Mao years and gathered such dramatic pace during the 1990s and beyond.

Mao's political legacy can also be seen in a positive light as far as China's international standing was concerned. The PRC relied on Russia for guidance during its formative years, but Mao had never slavishly followed Russia's instructions, and by 1960, China was acting independently and challenging the Soviet Union as leader of the communist world. China's frontiers were secured by matching the American forces in Korea and crushing dissent in Tibet, and China became acknowledged as one of the Great Powers when it took its seat on the UN Security Council in 1971.

The most significant downside to these positive political developments, of course, was the complete lack of freedom and respect for human rights. Individuals who opposed Communism could expect to be killed or imprisoned, and many thousands more fell victim to anti-rightist persecution simply because they were perceived as being disloyal. Over a decade after Mao's death, Deng's crushing of the pro-democracy movement in 1989 was a reminder that political opposition would not be tolerated, and the situation remains the same in 2015.

A further negative consequence arose from the way the Party developed, with cadres being accountable only to those above them in the hierarchy. This created a culture whereby unpleasant realities were ignored instead of being addressed, the dangers of which were most clearly demonstrated at the Lushan Conference of 1959. Here, because only Peng Dehuai was willing to admit the seriousness of the famine, grain procurements and exports were stepped up, and the famine became immeasurably worse, costing millions more lives. This temptation to deny reality permeated all levels of the Party and made it easy for the leadership to delude themselves about what was achievable, while more peasants died as a result.

Contemporary Chinese people who hold Mao in high esteem usually do so because of the economic transformation from which they continue to benefit and which he is often credited with starting. Certainly, the Five-Year Plans propelled China into industrialisation far earlier than would otherwise have happened, but whether the damage in terms of human suffering and wasted resources was justified is an entirely different question. If Deng, Liu and the economic planners had not been given the scope to redirect economic policy after 1960, it is doubtful whether the consequences of the Great Leap Forward could have been reversed. However, this is one of the many contradictions that surround Mao: although driven by ideological motives, national interest always came first, which meant he was occasionally prepared to yield to pragmatic compromises, even if he did not really approve of them. Hence Liu and Deng were allowed to dismantle the communes in order to end the famine; and in 1967, the PLA was allowed to restore order by crushing the Red Guards.

This pragmatism also explains why Zhou Enlai was allowed to survive in power throughout the period – despite his dangerously moderate views, Mao knew that he was simply too useful to purge. Even Deng, although purged, was later rehabilitated, because he was such a valuable stabilising influence when the Gang of Four needed bringing under control in the early 1970s.

The Cultural Revolution and the Great Leap Forward are often seen as Mao's main failures, because of the enormous human suffering they caused and because their impact was far more destructive than constructive. Mao may have gained political benefits from purging the Party of conservative views, but his credibility was fatally damaged, particularly among the young generation who had been the core of the Red Guards. Deprived of an education and rusticated among the peasantry, they rapidly became disillusioned with Mao once the hollowness of the personality cult became all too obvious to them.

During the period, Mao achieved some success in promoting social change, particularly in speeding up the emancipation of women (mainly through the new marriage law) and in improving levels of health care, but the egalitarian society for which Mao aimed remained a distant prospect. This was partly because changing a traditional society to such an ambitious extent would take generations to achieve in any case, and partly because other policies and priorities got in the way – notably, exorbitant spending on the war in Korea, the failure of the rural communes, and the disruption caused by the chaos of the Cultural Revolution.

Once Deng had won the power struggle that followed Mao's death, he abandoned most aspects of Mao's economic and social policies, replacing them with a hands-off approach. SOEs remained the basic form of industrial organisation, but much greater freedom was given to factory managers and technical experts, and the collectivisation of agriculture was no longer enforced. The market economy was restored, China was reopened to foreign trade, and Chinese students were encouraged to study abroad in order to gain knowledge of Western expertise. All talk of continuing revolution and class struggle was abandoned.

However, no changes were made to the political system that Mao had created, since it was this that enabled the Party to retain control and rule the state effectively. Deng may have presided over a period of economic modernisation, but he was a political hardliner, as have been his successors. This political rigidity has been the clearest long-term impact of the Communist revolution.

ACTIVITY
SUMMARY

Extent of social and cultural change

1 Take each of the social groups below in turn and identify:

   a) what they gained during the period, and why

   b) what they lost, and why.

   The peasantry; industrial workers; women; young people; religious believers

2 What evidence can you find from across the period 1949–76 that political priorities played a more dominant role than social motives for Mao?

3 Construct a spider diagram featuring each of the following. Link as many as you can in terms of their:

   a) purpose

   b) impact.

   Attacks on religions; Red Guards; Jiang Qing in charge of cultural renewal; barefoot doctors; Marriage Law 1950; Patriotic Health Campaign; Korean War

   Annotate the lines you draw when you link features together.

4 Go back to what Chen Yun said after Mao's death (see the Introduction). Explain why the verdict of posterity on Mao would have been different at each of the three points in time he refers to.

WIDER READING

Benton, G. and Chun, L. *Was Mao Really a Monster?* Routledge (2010)

Chang, J. and Halliday, J. *Mao, The Untold Story*, Vintage (2006)

Feigon, L. *Mao: A Reinterpretation*, Ivan R Dee (2007)

Li, Z. *The Private Life of Chairman Mao*, Arrow (1994)

Meisner, M. *Mao Zedong*, Polity Press (2007)

Min, A. *The Cooked Seed*, Bloomsbury (2013)

Stewart, G. *China 1900–76*, Pearson (2006)

Preparing for your AS Level Paper 2 exam

Advance planning

1. Draw up a timetable for your revision and try to keep to it. Spread your timetable over a number of weeks, and aim to cover four or five topics each week.
2. Spend longer on topics that you have found difficult, and revise them several times.
3. Above all, do not try to limit your revision by attempting to 'question spot'. Try to be confident about all aspects of your Paper 2 work, because this will ensure that you have a choice of questions in Section B.

Paper 2 overview:

AS Paper 2	Time: 1 hour 30 minutes	
Section A	Answer 1 compulsory two-part sources question	8+12 marks = 20 marks
Section B	Answer 1 question from a choice of 3	20 marks
	Total marks =	**40 marks**

You should familiarise yourself with the layout of the paper by looking at the examples published by Edexcel. The questions for each section are followed by eight pages of lined paper where you should write your answer.

Section A questions

Each of the two parts of the question will focus on one of the two contemporary sources provided. The sources together will total around 300 words. The (a) question, worth 8 marks, will be in the form of 'Why is Source 1 useful for an enquiry into…?' The (b) question, worth 12 marks, will be in the form of 'How much weight do you give the evidence of Source 2 for an enquiry into…?' In both your answers you should address the value of the content of the source, and then its nature, origin and purpose. Finally, you should use your own knowledge of the context of the source to assess its value.

Section B questions

These questions ask you to reach a judgement on an aspect of the topic studied. The questions will have the form, for example, of 'How far…', 'To what extent…' or 'How accurate is it to say…'. The questions can deal with historical concepts such as cause, consequence, change, continuity, similarity, difference and significance. You should consider the issue raised in the question, consider other relevant issues, and then conclude with an overall judgement.

The timescale of the questions could be as short as a single year or even a single event (an example from Option 2C.2 could be, 'To what extent was Russia's involvement in the First World War responsible for the fall of the Provisional Government in 1917?'). The timescale could be longer depending on the historical event or process being examined, but questions are likely to be shorter than those set for Sections A and B in Paper 1.

Use of time

This is an issue that you should discuss with your teachers and fellow students, but here are some suggestions for you.

1. Do not write solidly for 45 minutes on each question. For Section A it is essential that you have a clear understanding of the content of each source, the points being made, and the nature, origin and purpose of each source. You might decide to spend up to ten minutes reading the sources and drawing up your plan, and 35 minutes writing your answer.
2. For Section B answers you should spend a few minutes working out what the question is asking you to do, and drawing up a plan of your answer before you begin to write your response.

Preparing for your AS Level exams

Paper 2: AS Level sample answer with comments

Section A

Part A requires you to:

- identify key points in the source and explain them
- deploy your own knowledge of the context in which events took place
- make appropriate comments about the author/origin/purpose of the source.

Study Source 5 (Chapter 2, page 206) before you answer this question.

Why is Source 5 valuable to the historian for an enquiry into the reasons why the Second Five-Year Plan (1958–62) was so ambitious? Explain your answer using the source, the information given about it and your own knowledge of the historical context. (8 marks)

Average student answer

The source is valuable to the historian because it shows how well China had performed in the First Five-Year Plan, and the second plan was the logical next step. It comes from a publication that supported the government.

The article from 'China Pictorial' was written just after the first plan finished and is commenting on how successful it had been in increasing production. It boasts about steel production going up by 31.2% per year and the large number of new factories opening up, saying that the Chinese people showed 'amazing ability in building up the country'. As a result, the second plan will be 'even more awe-inspiring' and will produce 12 million tonnes of steel so that soon China will overtake Britain, even though its Industrial Revolution was so long ago. Therefore, because the first plan had been a success, there was every chance the second could go even further, and this comes across in the source.

The background to the source shows that 'China Pictorial' was on the side of the government because it featured Mao's calligraphy and was allowed to carry on during the Cultural Revolution. The timing of the source is significant because it was written just as the first plan finished, so the writer would be well placed to comment on its achievements, which of course is what influenced the government making the second plan so ambitious.

Overall the source is valuable because it makes it clear that the government knew that China had the potential to develop further because the first plan had been such a success, and it was using the magazine to drive people forward to greater efforts.

Opening paragraph is generalised. The observations made are valid, but are left undeveloped.

This shows understanding of the source content. However, there is no additional contextual knowledge. While the final sentence makes a valid inference, an example from the source to back it up would strengthen it.

The background is being examined here, but at a superficial level, without explaining relevance. The importance of the source as a means to inspire the public to work hard, and therefore make a more ambitious second plan succeed, has been overlooked.

A useful conclusion that summarises the answer, but the value of the source as a piece of propaganda has been hinted at rather than explicitly explained.

Verdict

This is an average answer because:

- it is focused on the question
- it identifies evidence from the source that shows the success of the first plan, and makes the point that the second plan built on this – so the content of the source has been understood and used
- it makes some attempt to examine the nature of the source, but without explicitly explaining its role as propaganda – therefore, as a piece of historical evidence, the source has only been used superficially
- it lacks own supporting contextual knowledge.

Use the feedback on this answer to rewrite it, making as many improvements as you can.

Paper 2: AS Level sample answer with comments

Section A

Part B requires you to:

- interrogate the source
- draw reasoned inferences
- deploy your own knowledge to interpret the material in its context
- make judgements about the value (weight) of the source in terms of making judgements.

Study Source 7 (Chapter 4, page 249) before you answer this question.

How much weight do you give the evidence of Source 7 for an enquiry into the Communists' approach to health care reform, 1949–76?

Explain your answer using the source, the information given about it and your own knowledge of the historical context. (12 marks)

Average student answer

This source carries quite a lot of weight for an enquiry into health reform because it comes from an eyewitness who personally participated in some aspects of the reforms during part of this period. It highlights some of the problems that the Chinese faced in training the barefoot doctors and the hard work that they put into it.

A reasonably focused start, but without reference to limitations of the source.

It is clear from what Horn has written that the Chinese authorities were not willing or able to invest much money into training the barefoot doctors, who lived in primitive conditions and had very little equipment to work with. He explains that they had to cram their training into four months of the year and the books they used had to be specially written by people like Horn in the mobile teams.

Adequate understanding is shown of the source's contents and there is a brief, but undeveloped, contextual hint about the economic constraints.

The scenes Horn describes fit in well with the approach to reform that Mao wanted. Mao wanted to make health care much more widely available, and knew that diseases like dysentery, cholera and typhoid needed to be controlled in order to reduce the high death rates in the countryside. However, there was little money to spend on health because of the disasters of the Great Leap Forward (1958–62), which had ruined the economy. Also, it was Mao's preferred method to promote mass involvement in campaigns in order to keep the spirit of the revolution alive, so there was an ideological reason for making the training of new doctors a grass-roots scheme involving ordinary people like this.

Context is provided more fully here to explain the nature of the scheme described by Horn.

However there is the problem that Horn was a Communist sympathiser so he has reasons to take a 'rose-tinted view' of the situation, and his account certainly conveys an optimistic view of the system, saying he was 'amazed' at how hard they studied. There is never any mention of the negative side of things, which does reduce the value of the source in such an enquiry.

Limitations are briefly discussed, which run into a concluding judgment.

Verdict

This is an average answer because:

- there is some attempt to question the source in terms of Horn's wishful thinking
- the contents have been understood and some inferences about the reasons for training doctors in this way have been made
- there is some clear contextual awareness – economic and ideological
- a brief judgment has been reached.

Use the feedback on this answer to rewrite it, making as many improvements as you can.

Paper 2: AS Level sample answer with comments

Section A

Part A requires you to:

- identify key points in the source and explain them
- deploy your own knowledge of the context in which events took place
- make appropriate comments about the author/origin/purpose of the source.

Study Source 5 (Chapter 2, page 206) before you answer this question.

Why is Source 5 valuable to the historian for an enquiry into the reasons why the Second Five-Year Plan (1958–62) was so ambitious?

Explain your answer using the source, the information given about it and your own knowledge of the historical context. (8 marks)

Strong student answer

The source is valuable for explaining why the Second Five Year-Plan was so ambitious because it provides factual details of the success of the first plan, which was the springboard for the second one, and it comes from a propaganda magazine that promoted government policies so it shows what the government wanted. This is important because it was the government that set the targets that made the Plan ambitious and it is expressing the government's view.

A strong start that identifies two reasons why the source is valuable for this enquiry.

'China Pictorial' was a propaganda magazine that expressed the views that the government wanted the public to share. The fact that it only started soon after the Communists took power suggests it was supportive of them and this is confirmed by the fact that Mao himself had helped to design its cover. Also, the fact that it was allowed to continue being published during the Cultural Revolution, when censorship was much tighter, shows that it must have been an important propaganda tool for the government. A significant reason for the ambitious nature of the new plan was that the government was confident that it could inspire the public to work hard by congratulating them on their efforts so far, and inspiring them to make even greater sacrifices.

A reason why the origin of the source makes it valuable is explained. Its role and impact as propaganda is also explained.

The first Plan succeeded in raising industrial output despite the disruption and cost of the Korean War before it was launched in 1952. The article is celebrating some of its successes, particularly steel production, which grew at an impressive rate of 30 percent each year. Steel was regarded as a key commodity by which to judge progress, a figure suggesting that China could advance even faster in the future. It is also claiming that the targets for industry and agriculture were 'over-fulfilled'. The confidence generated by the successes of the first plan is therefore a significant reason for the ambitious targets set for the future, when the government claimed China would overtake not just Britain, but also the USA.

Focuses on the factual content of the source, which is used to explain why the first plan promoted confidence of future progress.

What makes the source particularly valuable though is that it shows how confident the government had become, and it was their decision to make the second plan so ambitious – so much so that it became known as the 'Great Leap Forward'.

Useful concluding statement that picks out the main reason for its value to this enquiry.

Verdict

This is a strong answer because:

- it focuses sharply on the value of the source in this particular enquiry, not merely in general terms
- the contents of the source have been understood and used selectively
- accurate own knowledge has been used to put the source into context
- the nature of the source as a piece of propaganda has been examined and used to show its value here.

Paper 2: AS Level sample answer with comments

Section A

Part B requires you to:

- interrogate the source
- draw reasoned inferences
- deploy your own knowledge to interpret the material in its context
- make judgement about the value (weight) of the source in terms of making judgements.

Study Source 7 (Chapter 4, page 249) before you answer this question.

How much weight do you give the evidence of Source 7 for an enquiry into the Communists' approach to health care reform, 1949–76?

Explain your answer using the source, the information given about it and your own knowledge of the historical context. (12 marks)

Strong student answer

Source 7 is only of limited value for an enquiry into health reform for several reasons – it comes from someone with a clear personal interest to defend and only covers barefoot doctors. However, it is a vivid account of events as seen by an eyewitness and as such does carry some weight.

A focused introduction, indicating how the rest of the answer is going to develop and clearly hinting at limitations of the source.

It is clear from Dr Horn's background, and the fact that he uprooted his family to spend 15 years helping China rebuild, that he had strong communist sympathies. This does not mean that his account should be dismissed as propaganda, but it does explain why he dwells on the positive aspects of what he experienced. There are no mentions of complaints and the account provides no contextual information that would shed more light on the situation described.

Horn's standpoint is clearly understood from the inferences about his focus, and the need to treat the source with care is implied.

The reason why the scheme had to be like this was partly because the state had no money to invest in health reform after the disaster of the Great Leap Forward and particularly the famine of the early 1960s. Moreover, Mao's belief in continuous revolution meant he wanted to promote the involvement of ordinary people so that they renewed the revolution and identified with it. It may also be that some of the trainees learned so fast because they were ex-students who had been sent "down to the villages" when the Cultural Revolution was wound down after 1968.

Valid contextual knowledge is presented to provide a clearer explanation of why the situation described in the source existed.

The other key limitation here is that the source is confined to one aspect of health reform – the training of barefoot doctors. While this was a vital element of the reforms, there was a lot more going on in terms of educating people about disease prevention through the poster campaigns of the patriotic health movements. Among other things, these publicised ways of getting cleaner drinking water and disposing more carefully of human waste, and promoted campaigns to eradicate various pests – some of which were successful in improving health, such as the attacks on flies and bed bugs, some of which were much less so, notably the campaign to kill sparrows.

Useful own contextual knowledge brought in to show the narrow range covered by the source, which is a further limitation.

Overall therefore, the source certainly does have some value as a memorable description of how barefoot doctors were trained, but its value is limited by the limited range of what it covers and the fact that it comes from such a pro-Communist viewpoint.

A judgement is reached to put the value of the source for this enquiry into perspective.

Verdict

This is a strong answer because:

- it interrogates the source by examining its limitations while acknowledging its strengths
- it makes inferences about the reasons why health reforms were conducted in this way
- it provides accurate contextual own knowledge that helps make sense of what the source is (and is not) saying
- it remains focused on the question and reaches a clear final judgement.

Paper 2: AS Level sample answer with comments

Section B

These questions assess your understanding of the period in some depth. They will ask you about the content you learned about in the four key themes, but may not ask about more than one theme. For these questions remember to:

- give an analytical, not a descriptive, response
- support your points with evidence
- cover the whole time period specified in the question
- come to a substantiated judgement.

How accurate is it to say that it was mainly by the use of terror that the Communists tightened their grip on power in China in the years 1949–57? (20 marks)

Average student answer

Having defeated the Nationalists in the civil war, the Communists used a great deal of terror over the next eight years in order to tighten their grip on power. However, there were also several other factors that contributed to them consolidating their control.

The first victims of terror were the people who fell victim to the PLA's reunification campaigns in 1949–50. The Tibetans were most harshly dealt with because they lived in the far western frontier zone and had a tradition of independence, but their resistance was never fully controlled and they staged an uprising in 1959. Elsewhere terror was more successful, especially in Guangdong where the last remnants of Nationalist opposition were trying to regroup after their defeat in 1949.

The main use of terror was against counter-revolutionaries – people who were identified as having attitudes that went against communism. Mao told party bosses that he expected them to organise the killing of roughly one person in every thousand in each province in order to deter opposition from developing. It is estimated that over one million so-called counter-revolutionaries were killed in this way, and this certainly had the effect of frightening the bulk of the population into obedience.

In 1952 and 1953 terror was extended by the three and five anti campaigns against corruption in the government and workplace. Ordinary people participated by denouncing their colleagues to the authorities, and victims were subjected to humiliating struggle sessions, frequently beaten up, many being killed or taking their own lives. Survivors often ended up in labour camps (laogai) where conditions were inhumanely harsh and from which escape was unlikely, which therefore added to the effectiveness of the terror.

The final main terror campaign was the attack on the rightists, which Mao launched in 1957 against those intellectuals who had been foolish enough to come out into the open during the One Hundred Flowers movement that preceded it.

However, communist control was not tightened only by terror. Certain policies appealed to different groups in the population who were won over by the benefits they received. This applied mainly to the peasants, who welcomed the land reforms of 1950 giving them the chance to acquire land, and to women, who were enthusiastic about the new freedoms they got under the marriage law.

Simple introduction that targets the question but fails to specify what the "other" factors were.

Two targets of early terror are identified, but explanation of how this linked to tighter grip on power is left implicit.

Details of terror against potential counter-revolutionaries are accurately summarised here. Only a brief indication is given of how this tightened the Communist hold on power, so this aspect needs stronger development.

Several additional factors are identified here, and brief explanatory comments made about how these helped the Communists extend their power.

There was also some goodwill towards the Communists because they brought to an end so many years of fighting. Also they appeared to be tolerant towards Nationalist supporters who stayed behind in mainland China, so at first it appeared that the new regime would be stable and non-communists would be able to get on with their lives. It was only after a year in power that real terror was unleashed against the population and the true nature of the regime became apparent.

The war in Korea, which began for China in October 1950, also helped the Communists secure their power because Mao used it to create a sense of solidarity by claiming that all the Chinese had to stand together against a hostile outside world. War also enabled Mao to justify the terror campaigns against possible counter-revolutionaries, who were easy to portray as potential traitors.

Finally, the economic improvements helped the Communists increase their power. The terrible inflation of the Nationalist period was brought under control and under the First Five-Year Plan 1952–56, significant economic improvements were made and these filtered down to most of the population who lived in poverty.

In conclusion, Communist control was tightened largely by the brutal and widespread terror campaigns they waged, which had the effect of frightening the population into submission. However, the Communists were genuinely popular, especially among the peasantry, so their grip on power also owed something to popular support.

The conclusion is brief, but does return to the question.

Verdict

This is an average answer because:

- it covers the given factor and a reasonable range of valid other factors over the time period, making some attempt to explain the impact of these factors
- while it contains accurate evidence, this has not been fully used in order to explain precisely how each aspect gave the Communists more power
- the supporting evidence does come from across the period
- there is an attempt to reach a judgement.

Use the feedback on this answer to rewrite it, making as many improvements as you can.

Paper 2: AS Level sample answer with comments

Section B

These questions assess your understanding of the period in some depth. They will ask you about the content you learned about in the four key themes, but may not ask about more than one theme. For these questions remember to:

- give an analytical, not a descriptive, response
- support your points with evidence
- cover the whole time period specified in the question
- come to a substantiated judgement.

How accurate is it to say that it was mainly by the use of terror that the Communists tightened their grip on power in China in the years 1949–57? (20 marks)

Strong student answer

The Communists relied extensively on the use of terror to tighten their grip on power, particularly once the Korean War got under way in late 1950. However, their consolidation of control was made easier by a wide range of other factors, notably the creation of a new political system that gave them legitimacy and the support of the peasantry, who made up such a large proportion of the population.

A direct introduction that shows which way the argument will go and names some of the wider factors.

The PLA carried out the first important campaigns of terror in their reunification campaigns of 1949–50. Bringing Tibet and Xinjiang under government control safeguarded China's vulnerable western frontiers, although neither region was completely pacified, with Tibetan nationalists even staging a new uprising in 1959. Destroying the last remnants of GMD military resistance in the southern province of Guangdong tidied up the loose ends of the civil war. Using the army in these ways to apply military force against insecure frontier areas helped extend Party control from Beijing over the entire country and helped keep the country together as a unit in the future.

The value of the early reunification campaigns in tightening Party control has been explained.

The entry of PLA forces into North Korea in October 1950 gave Mao the ideal excuse to launch the Great Terror against potential opponents at home, since anyone suspected of disloyalty could now be depicted as a traitor in league with the USA, which was trying to destroy communism wherever it arose. The scale of terror was very extensive, as Mao put provincial leaders under pressure to set and fulfil quotas of victims. Conservative estimates put the death toll at around one million, and this had an obvious deterrent effect, frightening people into subservience. The Party's grip on power was also increased because ordinary people were implicated in these killings – either by denouncing landlords in the 1950 land reform meetings, or by informing on work colleagues in the 'anti' campaigns – which meant that they themselves had become agents of terror with a vested interest in keeping the Communists in power.

Terror became a permanent feature of life in communist China, with a new wave of anti-rightist persecution in 1957, when intellectuals who had been tempted to criticise the regime in the Hundred Flowers movement were targeted. Its effectiveness in subjugating people was reinforced by the laogai system, against which appeal was impossible and in which prisoners could expect to end their days.

Several ways in which terror helped the CP have been explained and, in particular, its permanence as a means of control is mentioned. Supporting evidence is accurate, though not detailed.

However, the Communists were also able to tighten their grip on power because they acted quickly to establish their political legitimacy. They appeared to allow a wide range of groups to have a say in the new CPPCC that drafted the new constitution, but then made sure that real power lay in the Politburo, which was dominated by their own elite and where Mao's authority

The role of additional factors, political and economic, are explained here, with links to the question made.

was unchallengeable. Furthermore, the power of the PLA in the new system was of paramount importance, since the army was the most effective means of implementing terror, and its loyalty was beyond question.

Economic improvements also helped the Communists strengthen their hold on power. Once the rampant inflation of the GMD years was brought under control, the first Five-Year Plan could be inaugurated, and by 1957 this had produced moderately successful results. An annual economic growth rate of 9 percent compared favourably with the USSR and living standards were improving after years of poverty. This was particularly useful to the Communists in the urban areas, since support for Chinese Communism came essentially from the countryside at first.

Social reforms also won the Communists the support of key groups. Women were liberated from the prospect of unhappy marriages by the new Marriage Law of 1950, and even if gender equality remained a distant vision in reality, women had got more from the Communists in one year than they had ever got from the GMD. Peasants also welcomed the chance that the new land reforms gave them to become landowners themselves – again through a reform that was introduced at the start of the period. By the time that the less popular moves towards collectivisation were gathering pace in the mid-1950s, terror had already become too widespread for resistance to be realistic.

Two more valid factors are identified, social and psychological, again with an attempt to link evidence to the Communist grip on power.

Finally the siege mentality that Mao engendered during the Korean War also helped the Party cement its position in power, giving it huge propaganda opportunities to portray itself as the protector of China against capitalist imperialism. The fact that Russia chose to stay out of the conflict added to the self-confidence of the Chinese Communists, who had stood up to the Americans alone.

In conclusion, although a wide range of factors contributed to the Communists tightening their grip on power, terror was clearly the most important and became a constant feature of daily life. However, the Communists were careful at first to appear tolerant towards non-Communists, only daring to unleash a concerted policy of terror after they had been in power for a year and then using the threat of US invasion to justify it. First of all they had to ensure that basic political and economic stability were established.

The conclusion makes the argument clear, that terror was indeed the main factor, but tries to place it in chronological context and comment on the relative importance of other factors.

Verdict

This is a strong answer because:

- it analyses the key factors that enabled the Communists to tighten their grip and relevance is sustained by frequent references to key words in the question
- there is adequate (not extensive) factual evidence to support the points
- there is evidence from across the eight years of the question
- a supported judgement has been reached.

Preparing for your A Level Paper 2 exam

Advance planning

1. Draw up a timetable for your revision and try to keep to it. Spread your timetable over a number of weeks, and aim to cover four or five topics each week.
2. Spend longer on topics that you have found difficult, and revise them several times.
3. Above all, do not try to limit your revision by attempting to 'question spot'. Try to be confident about all aspects of your Paper 2 work, because this will ensure that you have a choice of questions in Section B.

Paper 2 overview

AL Paper 2	Time: 1 hour 30 minutes	
Section A	Answer 1 compulsory source question	20 marks
Section B	Answer 1 question from a choice of 2	20 marks
	Total marks =	40 marks

You should familiarise yourself with the layout of the paper by looking at the examples published by Edexcel. The questions for each section are followed by eight pages of lined paper where you should write your answer.

Section A questions

This question asks you to assess two different types of contemporary sources totalling around 400 words, and will be in the form of 'How far could the historian make use of Sources 1 and 2 together to investigate…?' Your answer should evaluate both sources, considering their nature, origin and purpose, and you should use your own knowledge of the context of the sources to consider their value to the specific investigation. Remember, too, that in assessing their value, you must consider the two sources, taken together, as a set.

Section B questions

These questions ask you to reach a judgement on an aspect of the topic studied. The questions will have the form, for example, of 'How far…', 'To what extent…' or 'How accurate is it to say…'. The questions can deal with historical concepts such as cause, consequence, change, continuity, similarity, difference and significance. You should consider the issue raised in the question, then other relevant issues, and conclude with an overall judgement.

The timescale of the questions could be as short as a single year or even a single event (an example from Option 2C.2 could be, 'To what extent was Russia's involvement in the First World War responsible for the fall of the Romanovs in 1917?'). The timescale could be longer depending on the historical event or process being examined, but questions are likely to be shorter than those set for Sections A and B in Paper 1.

Use of time

This is an issue that you should discuss with your teachers and fellow students, but here are some suggestions for you.

1. Do not write solidly for 45 minutes on each question. For Section A it is essential that you have a clear understanding of the content of each source, the points being made, and the nature, origin and purpose of each source. You might decide to spend up to ten minutes reading the sources and drawing up your plan, and 35 minutes writing your answer.
2. For Section B answers you should spend a few minutes working out what the question is asking you to do, and drawing up a plan of your answer before you begin to write your response.

Preparing for your A Level exams

Paper 2: A Level sample answer with comments

Section A

You will need to read and analyse two sources and use them in tandem to assess how useful they are in investigating an issue. For these questions remember to:

- spend time, up to ten minutes, reading and identifying the arguments and evidence present in the sources; then make a plan to ensure that your response will be rooted in these sources
- use specific references from the sources
- deploy your own knowledge to develop points made in the sources and establish appropriate context
- come to a substantiated judgement.

Study Sources 14 and 15 (Chapter 4, pages 259 and 260) before you answer this question.

How far could the historian make use of Sources 14 and 15 together to investigate the impact of the campaign to eradicate religion after 1949?

Explain your answer using both sources, the information given about them and your knowledge of the historical context. (20 marks)

Average student answer

These two sources both describe the anti-religious campaigns of the Communists in the period, Source 14 against the Catholics and Source 15 against ancestor worship. The source describing what happened to the Catholics contains more detail, but the fact that Sister Zhang was 100 when she gave the interview throws some doubt over whether we can trust her recollections completely. However, she was an eyewitness and will certainly have remembered the main events since they had a drastic impact on her life, and led to her being sent into forced labour.

A relevant opening. There is some attempt to interrogate the background of Source 14.

Li Zhisui was also an eyewitness, and we know he spent a lot of time in Mao's company so he knew him very well, which also makes his evidence useful. In addition, the fact that he wrote his book only after Mao was dead and he had moved to America makes his evidence useful because he will have been under no pressure to flatter Mao or keep embarrassing things quiet. Mao had banned ancestor worship, but in the source he is upset that his parents' graves have been destroyed, which Dr Li would not have dared say in Mao's lifetime. Both sources therefore come from eyewitnesses whose accounts are going to be of value.

The credibility of Dr Li is interrogated here. While the comments are valid, they could go much further. The focus is kept on the question.

Source 14 is useful because it tells us how the Communists went about persecuting Catholics and it shows that the campaign worked because the Church was closed down and most of the Catholics gave in without a fight. Some Catholics even criticised their own Church, accusing it of 'enslaving them' and their numbers slumped from 400 to three overnight, so the campaign was successful in this area at least. The small number of Catholics who refused to give in ended up being sentenced to hard labour sometime later.

There is not so much detail about the campaign to destroy ancestral shrines, but it is clear in this case that they were destroyed to provide building materials for the backyard furnaces. Even Mao's parents' graves were ruined, which suggests that no one's graves or shrines were safe and therefore the campaign was a success, although Mao had personal misgivings, saying that the shrine should have been left alone and was useful in cheering people up.

Overall, therefore the two sources do provide a significant amount of useful material to the historian investigating the campaigns against religion, especially as they come from believable eyewitnesses.

Valuable details have been extracted from both sources, and there is some attempt being made to draw inferences from them and to direct them at the question.

Very brief as a concluding statement. The similarities and differences could be developed further, to much greater effect.

Verdict

This is an average answer because:

- it shows understanding of the content of the two sources, which is treated analytically
- evidence from the content is selected and linked to the focus of the question
- it makes only limited reference to the background context, which is left significantly undeveloped, and there is little attempt to bring in own knowledge
- it makes some attempt to establish the utility of the sources, in particular the credibility of Dr Li as an eyewitness.

Use the feedback on this answer to rewrite it, making as many improvements as you can.

Paper 2: A Level sample answer with comments

Section A

You will need to read and analyse two sources and use them in tandem to assess how useful they are in investigating an issue. For these questions remember to:

- spend time, up to ten minutes, reading and identifying the arguments and evidence present in the sources; then make a plan to ensure that your response will be rooted in these sources
- use specific references from the sources
- deploy your own knowledge to develop points made in the sources and establish appropriate context
- come to a substantiated judgement.

Study Sources 14 and 15 (Chapter 4, pages 259 and 260) before you answer this question.

How far could the historian make use of Sources 14 and 15 together to investigate the impact of the campaign to eradicate religion after 1949?

Explain your answer, using both sources, the information given about them and your knowledge of the historical context. (20 marks)

Strong student answer

Both sources would be useful to the historian investigating the campaign against religion because they both come from eyewitnesses with a good eye for detail. Zhang Yinxian says she 'will never forget 1952' and can remember what people said and some details, such as the rats taking over when everyone left. Even though she was over 100 when she was interviewed, and she had a clear motive for criticising the people who attacked her church, the detail makes her evidence seem convincing. In any case, even if some details are inaccurate, the fact remains that the church of which she was a member was closed down, and she and her two colleagues were put to hard labour. Moreover, her account was the product of a historian seeking out evidence from participants – Zhang herself was not seeking to publicise the events. The fact that Liao Yiwu is a critic of the regime in China does not detract from the value of the evidence at all because it is an interview and these are the words of Zhang, rather than the author's version of them.

A direct opening, which explores the background to Source 14 in some detail and why this makes it useful, despite the obvious doubt raised by Zhang's age.

Dr Li also had a keen eye for detail, noticing how people in Mao's entourage responded to the situation and remembering Mao's reaction carefully. Li also wrote his account years after the event, from his new home in the USA, but he is resisting the temptation to attack Mao as a hypocrite who continued to take ancestor worship seriously, even though it was officially banned. It would have been easy to have mocked Mao, from the safety of his new home, for causing the destruction of his parents' shrine by his backyard furnace scheme, but the fact that Li does not do this suggests that his account is accurate.

The background to Dr Li's account is explored, and again its value is established quite carefully.

Both sources provide useful details of the campaign against religion, but they are more explicitly stated in Source 14. This account explains the pressure that Catholics were put under as they underwent a 'political review process', and the impact is clear from the fact that they 'left in droves', some even going so far as to renounce the church and accuse it of 'enslaving them'. However, the actual wording of the renunciation makes it sound as though they may have merely been agreeing with a statement put in front of them because it sounds like one of the official slogans that the Communists often used.

The value of the details provided in Source 14 is effectively weighed up here and linked to the wider context by some own knowledge of the anti-Catholic campaign.

The scale of the change is indicated by the statistics – 400 Catholics being reduced to a mere three. It is also apparent that the few, like the Bishop and Zhang, who did resist, were given a stay of execution before being dealt with. This ties in with the patriotic churches initiative which the government launched in a bid to appear more tolerant to the outside world, while retaining total control of the Christian Churches. Perhaps the resistance of Zhang, her aunt and the Bishop was partly accounted for by the Vatican's policy, which was not to yield to persecution.

Source 15 shows that ancestral shrines were sacrificed if they stood in the way of economic progress. If even Mao's mother's favourite Buddhist shrine and his parents' gravestones were demolished to provide the stone for backyard furnaces, then this suggests that the campaign was effective at least in removing the physical evidence of ancestor worship. However, Mao's personal sadness at the loss of his parents' graves shows that the campaign was less effective in changing people's attitudes. The same might be said of the campaign against the Catholic Church in Source 14, but to a lesser extent since only three people actively resisted and it looks as if most gave in quietly.

Taken together, the two sources do provide some useful evidence about the anti-religious campaigns, although they only cover two elements of the campaign which was also waged more widely against Buddhism, Islam, Confucianism and the Protestant Church. They show some similarities, in that both come from reasonably reliable and observant eyewitnesses. The fact that one (Source 14) comes from a victim of the campaign, while the other was written by a spectator adds something to their overall value.

The slightly more complicated scenario described in Source 15 is explained here, and there is a strong inference about the success of the campaign at a superficial level, since even Mao was in a sense a victim.

In this concluding paragraph, and at the end of the previous one, an attempt is being made to sum up by examining their joint value. Similarities and differences are being recognised and taken into account.

Verdict

This is a strong answer because:

- it shows understanding of the content provided by both sources and appropriate details are selected and made relevant to the enquiry
- it brings in accurate contextual information, which is linked to the material selected from the sources themselves
- it examines the nature of the two sources as eyewitness accounts quite closely, and makes careful inferences from this about their utility and limitations
- there is some attempt to assess the two sources as a pair.

Paper 2: A Level sample answer with comments

Section B

These questions assess your understanding of the period in some depth. They will ask you about the content you learned about in the four key themes, but may not ask about more than one theme. For these questions remember to:

- give an analytical, not a descriptive, response
- support your points with evidence
- cover the whole time period specified in the question
- come to a substantiated judgement.

How accurate is it to say that Mao's main motives for launching the Cultural Revolution in 1966 were ideological rather than political? (20 marks)

Average student answer

The Cultural Revolution began with the first great rally in Tiananmen Square, attended by a million Red Guards in August 1966. Mao was motivated to launch it by a mixture of both ideological and political motives.

Ideology was always important to Mao and one key element of this was his concern to prevent 'the revolution going to sleep'. He knew that if things were allowed to settle down for too long, then complacency would creep in and people would become more interested in preserving their vested interests than in creating a genuine communist state. Things had settled down in China since the Great Leap Forward was launched in 1958, mainly due to the appalling famine that it caused, but Mao knew it was time to start a new initiative before it was too late. Mao was also aware that there were a lot of young people who had not yet been involved in the revolution and it was the ideal time to get them involved so that they would feel that they had helped to create communism and would therefore be willing to defend it from future attack. This is why the Cultural Revolution gave such freedom of action to the Red Guards, who were told to go out and smash the 'four olds'.

Another way in which Mao can be seen as ideologically motivated is because he was worried that ever since 1960 capitalism had been coming back into the economy. This was because Liu and Deng had been given the task of restoring economic stability after the famine, and to do so they had allowed many communes to disband and had restored private trade. China was even importing food from capitalist countries, which made it look to the rest of the world that communism was failing. Mao hated this and he had started accusing Liu in public of being a 'capitalist roader', who had chosen the wrong track for China.

A weak opening because it gives no indication of how the answer will develop and provides only basic context.

Two valid aspects of ideology as a motivating reason are introduced here, but the lack of factual development weakens it.

This point has much more factual support. However, the importance of these ideological factors in influencing Mao needs summing up before the argument moves on to the political motives.

However, Mao also had political motives for starting the Cultural Revolution. Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping, who were in charge of restoring economic stability, had become quite popular with peasants who preferred private ownership to the communes and inside the Communist Party. Mao easily got paranoid about threats to his leadership of the Party, and he had made the mistake of stepping down in favour of Liu as chairman of the Republic after the Great Leap Forward went wrong. Even though Liu probably was not plotting to take over, Mao thought he was and decided to get rid of him as soon as he could.

With this aim in mind, Mao started building up his personality cult, mainly with the help of the PLA leader, Lin Biao, who produced 'The Little Red Book' of Mao quotations and made it an essential part of army training. It was also much used by teachers in schools as a textbook to influence the younger generation the same way. Mao also got radical supporters from Shanghai, such as Chen Boda and Kang Sheng, into important politburo positions, so that by 1966 he felt he had enough support to launch an attack on Liu. Liu did not seem to realise what was happening until it was too late.

In 1966, Mao announced his return to politics by his much-publicised swim in the Yangtze and then his supporters in the politburo started a wall poster campaign to encourage the university students to rebel against teachers who were not revolutionary enough. When Liu made the mistake of trying to control the student unrest, it was easy to make him appear as a counter-revolutionary and to discredit him. He was sacked from his post soon after, and the Cultural Revolution had begun with the Red Guard students going out to destroy the 'four olds'.

Political factors, then, did also play a key part in Mao's decision to launch the Cultural Revolution, since Mao was determined he had to act to get rid of Liu and Deng, both of whom he saw as threats to his leadership. The Cultural Revolution actually got started because Mao wanted to discredit Liu, and he could do this once he had lined up enough support from the politburo and in the country as a whole, where the army and young people had become followers of the Mao cult. However, ideology was equally important because Mao took this very seriously having written a lot about it before he got to power. He was worried that the revolution would run out of steam if a big new mass mobilisation campaign was not launched soon, and the young people were ideal to carry this out.

Mao's political motive for wanting to downgrade Liu is explained clearly enough, with adequate support provided. The point about Mao's paranoia could be strengthened by referring to other occasions when rivals were removed in pre-emptive strikes.

The events leading to the start of the Cultural Revolution are described here. As it stands it looks like freestanding narrative, but it could easily be strengthened by making stronger links to the question. For example, a comment explaining that Mao dared not act against Liu, his political rival, until he had strengthened his own support base inside the key organ of the Party and in the country at large.

The conclusion does bring both parts of the answer together, but there is still no answer to the question. Each part has merely been summed up and no overall judgement made.

Verdict

This is an average answer because:

- while it covers the key elements of the argument accurately, with some analysis, there are also some descriptive passages
- it shows understanding of what the question is driving at, but the paragraphs need linking more strongly to the wording of the question
- an overall judgement is lacking – the evidence in support of each viewpoint is summarised, but there is no overall answer to the question
- the answer is generally well organised and clearly written.

Use the feedback on this answer to rewrite it, making as many improvements as you can.

Paper 2: A Level sample answer with comments

Section B

These questions assess your understanding of the period in some depth. They will ask you about the content you learned about in the four key themes, but may not ask about more than one theme. For these questions remember to:

- give an analytical, not a descriptive response
- support your points with evidence
- cover the whole time period specified in the question
- come to a substantiated judgement.

How accurate is it to say that Mao's main motives for launching the Cultural Revolution in 1966 were ideological rather than political? (20 marks)

Strong student answer

Several aspects of Mao's ideology played a key role in his decision to launch the Cultural Revolution in 1966. Mao was concerned that true socialism was being undermined by the pragmatic economic policies followed by Liu and Deng since 1961. He was also anxious to prevent the revolution losing its impetus and therefore wanted to launch a new mass campaign as soon as possible. However, his motives were also political – he was determined to reassert his political power, which had slipped since he stepped down as leader of the PRC in 1959 – so he started the Cultural Revolution for a combination of both reasons.

Constantly renewing the revolution was vital to Mao for ideological reasons, because he feared that if the revolution stopped moving forward, then old bourgeois attitudes would start to resurface and the gains already made would be lost. This is what he thought had gone wrong in the Soviet Union. By the early 1960s, China had split from Russia and was portraying itself as the main Communist power in the world, so it suited Mao for this political reason to follow a different path from Russia. However, since the need to continue the revolution was so deeply entrenched in his thinking, it was inevitable that Mao would launch a new drive forward at some point in the mid-1960s. It is therefore fair to argue that ideology was at the forefront of his reasons for launching the Cultural Revolution.

Moreover, Mao was deeply worried that the dismantling of communes and return to private farming which had been reintroduced in the early 1960s was taking China in the wrong direction because it was dangerously 'revisionist'. While Mao had eventually conceded that the famine had come about because of the Great Leap Forward and had therefore empowered Liu, Deng and Chen Yun to take whatever steps were necessary to restore food supplies to acceptable levels, he refused to accept that the commune system itself was inherently flawed. He preferred to blame individuals, such as poorly trained cadres or lazy peasants, for failing to implement the communes properly. Mao was anxious that China was taking the 'capitalist road' and his decision to summon the 7,000-cadre conference in 1962 was designed to put a stop to any further drift in this direction, even if the outcome was not what he had planned.

Even worse ideologically was the fact that China began importing grain from the USA. As soon as the economic situation improved in China, Mao wanted to restore the 'correct' socialist approach, and purging those Communist leaders who accepted the pragmatic economic approach would be vital in order to achieve this.

A final ideological factor motivating Mao was his desire to 'blood' the younger generation in revolutionary activity. By encouraging the creation of Red Guard units in 1966 and assuring the

A strong opening paragraph that directly addresses the question and uses some selected detail to indicate the direction of the argument. No overall judgement has yet been made, but that will not matter as long as it has emerged by the end.

The first ideological reason is explained here. The comparison with Russia shows wider knowledge and is relevant. This has been recognised as evidence of a political motive, which shows how hard it is to disentangle the two.

Three more aspects of how Mao was motivated by ideological considerations are tackled here. Each is made relevant to the question and the level of support is adequate, avoiding unnecessary detail.

young that it was 'right to rebel' against authority, a new mass mobilisation campaign could be set in motion which would harness the enthusiasm of the young and in the process make them identify more closely with the new China. Lin Biao and Chen Boda had been preparing the ground for this by developing the Mao cult among the teenage generation since at least 1963, and by 1966 Mao felt the young were ready to be unleashed.

However, it is hard to separate these ideological motives from his political aim to restore his own power and sideline potential rivals before they became too popular. These political factors account for the timing of the Cultural Revolution. It began as an attack on individuals within the hierarchy of the Communist Party, before broadening into the attack on the 'four olds' in society at large by the Red Guards.

By 1963, Mao was seeking to reassert the political power he had conceded when he had installed Liu in his place as head of state in 1959, and he had moved even further into the background when Liu and Deng, the Party secretary, began the painful process of restoring the economy in the early 1960s. Not only did Mao have ideological objections to their economic policies, but he was also concerned on a political level that both were getting too popular.

The Socialist Education Movement of 1963 can be seen as Mao's first attempt to regain the political initiative. Mao launched the movement in order to reintroduce basic socialist values in the countryside and relaunch the class struggle at a local level, but its impact was limited by Liu who, as head of state, was able to use central control to prevent it becoming as radical as Mao wished. To Mao this was further evidence that Liu was dangerous, and he accused him openly of taking the 'capitalist road' at the 1964 Party Conference.

By 1965, Mao felt strong enough to test the waters again by authorising the attack on Wu Han's play, although, like a guerrilla leader, he was ready to back off and distance himself if things went wrong. However, this was not necessary because the personality cult that Lin Biao had been building up through 'The Little Red Book', and the recent promotion of the Shanghai radicals to the politburo, meant that Mao now had enough support within the Party hierarchy to defeat his enemies. By launching the 1966 poster campaign in the universities over the head of Liu, and whipping up the students into a force that Liu could not stop, Mao left Liu powerless to prevent his demotion later in the year. It was clear from the positions in the background that Liu and Deng occupied on the podium at the first mass Tiananmen Square rally in August 1966 that they had fallen from grace. It was these political machinations against Liu, and to a lesser extent Deng, that provided the catalyst for the start of the Cultural Revolution – they explain the timing of its outbreak.

The events at the start of the Cultural Revolution and its timing, therefore, owed much to Mao's political calculations. In early 1966 he was manipulating events in the hope of flushing out his political rivals at a time when he felt strong enough to do this, which he had not been earlier. However, to Mao, ideological considerations were paramount and constant, whereas political motives came and went depending on circumstances. Mao's ideology dictated that a new mass mobilisation campaign was necessary every few years, and one which involved the next generation was essential in order to guarantee the long-term future of communism. Bearing this in mind it is safe to say that political motives, while definitely significant to Mao in the short term, were of secondary importance overall compared to his ideological priorities.

This paragraph is useful because it explains how the argument is moving from one side of the case to the other, and shows some conceptual understanding that the two reasons cannot always be separated.

These three paragraphs explain the development of Mao's political manoeuvring against Liu and Deng. There is some description of events, but this is made relevant and it helps to explain the stages by which Mao defeated Liu, and therefore the timing of the start of the Cultural Revolution.

A strong conclusion because the judgement is made clear, and it has been supported by the evidence presented in the rest of the answer.

Verdict

This is a strong answer because:

- it analyses relevant ideological and political considerations, using accurate and detailed support
- it shows a clear grasp of what is being asked and conceptual awareness that Mao's motives cannot be separated
- it reaches an overall judgement neatly based on the evidence, and is structured logically and coherently.

The German Democratic Republic, 1949–90

In 1949, four years after the end of the Second World War, the German Democratic Republic (GDR) was formally established. The GDR existed as a communist state for just over 40 years until it became part of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) in October 1990. Throughout its history, the GDR found itself on the very front line of the **Cold War**, and its capital, Berlin, often became a stark focus of the superpower rivalry between the USA and the USSR (Soviet Russia).

KEY TERM

Cold War
The period of political conflict, military tension and competition between the USSR and the USA and their allies following the end of the Second World War until the early 1990s. Tension arose due to their different ideologies and each believing the other wanted to expand their influence and territorial control.

How was the GDR established?

The GDR, along with the FRG, was created as a result of divisions between the victorious powers (the USSR, the USA, Britain and France) after the Second World War. Their failure to agree on the status of post-war Germany meant that the country was divided up. While the Western sectors were merged to form the FRG, East Germany became a socialist state supported by the USSR. It was, in effect, a one-party state led by the Marxist-Leninist Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED). Yet the existence of the GDR could only be sustained by the construction of a wall to stop its citizens from emigrating to the West.

How did the GDR develop between 1961 and 1985?

The construction of the **Berlin Wall** in 1961 was to become the most symbolic feature of the GDR's control of its own citizens. For the GDR, the Wall was regarded as an essential defence against the West. The GDR government saw the FRG and its Western allies as expansionist powers that threatened the survival of the GDR. For the West, the Wall was a cruel construction by a government that had resorted to imprisoning its own people.

Behind the security of the Wall, the GDR was able to implement socialist policies with some success. While the GDR compared unfavourably with the much more affluent capitalist FRG, when compared with its communist counterparts in Eastern Europe, the GDR demonstrated a very successful economy and consequently higher living standards. Although the GDR was viewed by the West as an artificial puppet state of the USSR, it was able to gain some international recognition and prestige.

KEY TERM

Berlin Wall
This was built in 1961 to close the border between East and West Berlin. Berlin had been divided after the Second World War, and the USA, France and Britain controlled what became known as West Berlin. East Berlin was controlled by the GDR. Many left the GDR by crossing from East into West Berlin. This led to the GDR government closing the border between the two parts of the city. The Wall remained until 1989.

1945
1945 – End of the Second World War

1949
May 1949 – The establishment of West Germany (FRG)
October 1949 – The establishment of East Germany (GDR)

1951
1951 – First Five-Year Plan

1961
1961 – The building of the Berlin Wall

1989
October 1989 – Soviet leader Gorbachev visits East Berlin for the GDR's 40th anniversary celebrations
Honecker replaced by Krenz as General Secretary of the SED
November 1989 – The opening of the Berlin Wall

1948–49 – 1948–49 – Berlin Blockade

1950 – 1950 – Ministry for State Security is set up (Stasi)

1953 – 1953 – June Uprising

1971 – 1971 – Honecker succeeds Ulbricht as leader of the SED

1990 – October 1990 – The reunification of Germany

USEFUL ABBREVIATIONS

GDR
The German Democratic Republic, sometimes referred to as the DDR (*Deutsche Demokratische Republik*). Also commonly known as East Germany.

FRG
The Federal Republic of Germany, or West Germany.

SED
The Socialist Unity Party of Germany, the ruling party of the GDR.

USSR
The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, or the Soviet Union.

What was it like living in East Germany?

For most of its citizens, all aspects of life were controlled by the government. They were members of mass organisations such as the Free German Youth, the Women's Democratic Organisation and the German Cultural League, all of which were controlled by the SED and used to spread and maintain communist ideology. The state had an extremely extensive system of state surveillance and the government maintained strict controls over education, the media, trade unions and the right to travel. Therefore, for many, the use of the term 'democratic' within the Republic's name itself gives a very misleading impression of the GDR.

SOURCE 1 The body of Peter Fechter (1944–62) being removed from the death strip at the Berlin Wall. Fechter was an 18-year-old bricklayer from East Berlin who, in August 1962, was shot attempting to cross the Berlin Wall. He fell into the death strip where he could be seen in the West as he screamed for help. Onlookers in the West could not reach him; guards in the East left him as he slowly bled to death. His body was then removed by GDR border guards. In 1990, a memorial was built at the spot where he died.



Why did the GDR collapse in 1990?

By the late 1980s, the GDR faced several significant problems:

- Its economy was very weak and had become dependent on FRG financial support.
- The reformist policies of the new Soviet leader, Gorbachev, meant that it no longer had the support of the USSR.
- Growing popular protest in many neighbouring communist states was starting to have an influence on the GDR's own population.

In November 1989, the combination of these pressures led the GDR's government to open the Berlin border to its citizens. In March 1990, free elections in the GDR showed overwhelming popular support for reunification with the FRG. The reuniting of the two German states, however, still needed the agreement of the four Second World War allies: the USA, Britain, France and the USSR. This was negotiated by the autumn of 1990 and, on 3 October, the FRG formally incorporated the GDR into its territory. For the first time since the Second World War, a newly enlarged reunited Germany emerged, no longer controlled by the superpowers – a new era in global politics.

2b.1 Establishing and consolidating communist rule in the GDR, c1949–61

KEY QUESTIONS

- Why did events in the years 1945 to 1949 lead to the division of Germany?
- To what extent was the system of government in the GDR democratic?
- How successful was the development of the GDR's economy in the years 1949–61?
- Why did the GDR find it necessary to build the Berlin Wall in 1961?

INTRODUCTION

For most of the second half of the 20th century, there were two very different German states. The German Democratic Republic (GDR) was based on communist ideology and was allied to the USSR and the other communist states in Eastern Europe. The Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) was a capitalist society, and was allied to the USA and other Western states, such as Britain and France. The two German states were divided by the heavily fortified 'inner-German border' that stretched for nearly 1,448 km from the Baltic Sea to Czechoslovakia.

Within the GDR, and more than 150 km from the border with the FRG, was Berlin. The city was divided into East Berlin (the capital of the GDR) and West Berlin, which was made up of three sectors controlled by the USA, Britain and France. From 1961 until 1989, East and West Berlin were blocked off from one another with what was at first barbed wire and then a high concrete wall, together with watchtowers, landmines and guard dogs.

The future development of the GDR when it was first established in 1949 was very uncertain. Many, in both the GDR and the FRG, believed Germany's post-war division was only temporary. Even its national anthem anticipated reunification and included lines that referred to Germany as one nation. The original GDR constitution was deliberately drawn up to be very similar to the FRG's in order to accommodate possible reunification. Even more threatening to the GDR's existence was the fact that, every year, hundreds of thousands of its citizens illegally emigrated to the FRG. The vast majority of those who emigrated were young, skilled workers – the very individuals the GDR needed most for its economic livelihood, as well as for its political credibility.

Although from 1949 to 1961 many contemporaries regarded the existence of the GDR as fragile, the 1950s were seen by the GDR government as a period that would be devoted to the creation of the basis of socialism. This early stage of the GDR's long-term commitment to building a communist state would mean implementing key measures in accordance with Stalin's beliefs: the rapid expansion of heavy industry and an intensified **class struggle** in order to secure the GDR's future against the West.

KEY TERM

Class struggle
This term within communist ideology is used to explain the conflict between the working class (proletariat) and the middle class (bourgeoisie). The GDR government used this principle to justify policies such as the redistribution of agricultural land.



January 1949 – First Socialist Unity Party (SED) Party Conference

May 1949 – End of Berlin Airlift

1951 – First Five-Year Plan

1953 – Workers' Uprising

1949 | 1950 | 1951 | 1952 | 1953 | 1954

May 1949 – FRG formally established

October 1949 – Formation of GDR

1950 – Creation of the Ministry for State Security (Stasi)

First elections to the *Volkskammer*

GDR joins COMECON

1952 – Five *Länder* of GDR replaced with 14 districts

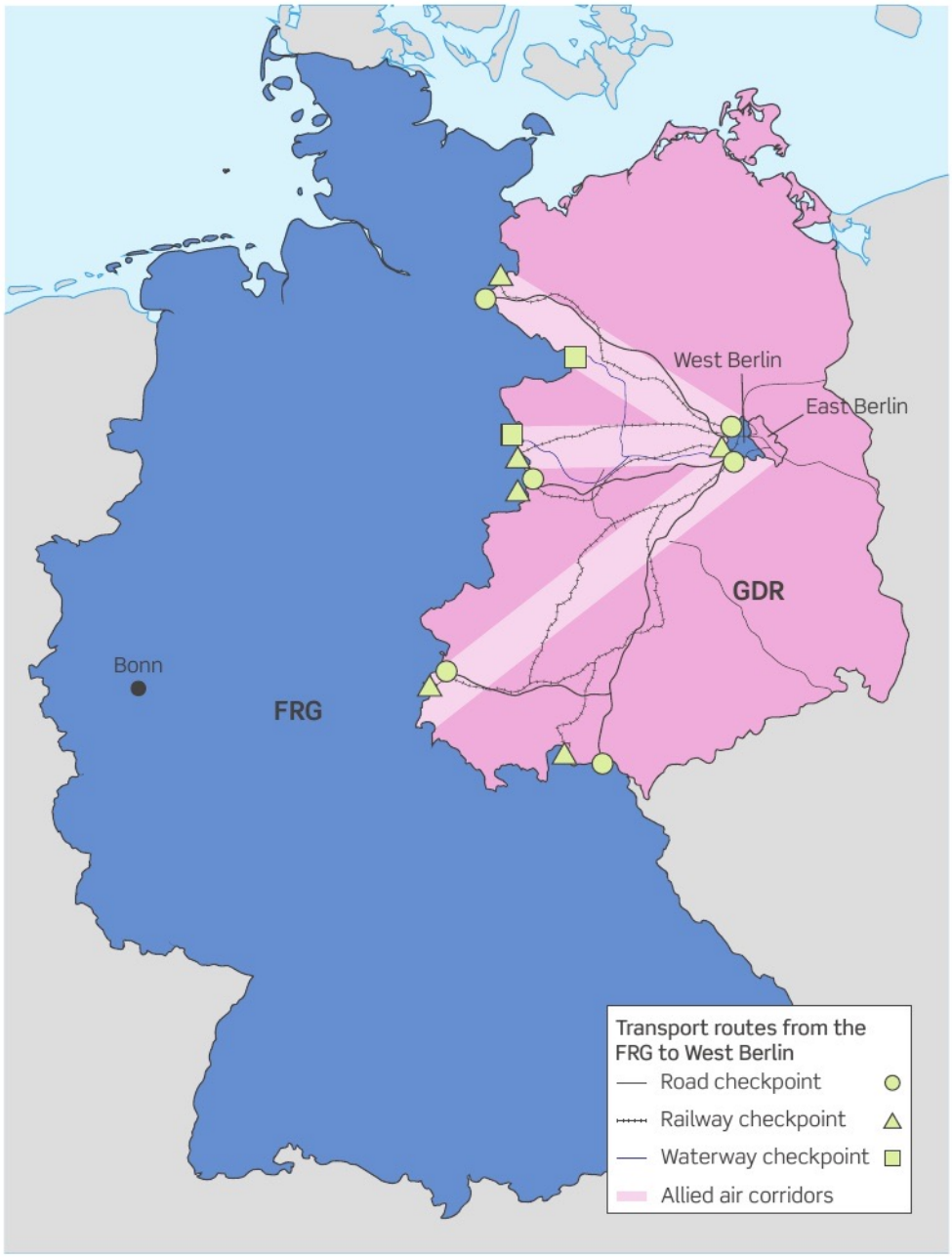


Figure 1.1 The division of Germany and Berlin from 1949 to 1989.



1955 – Warsaw Pact founded

1956 – Second Five-Year Plan

1958 – *Länderkammer* abolished

Khrushchev issues ultimatum over the status of Berlin

1959 – GDR adopts own flag

1960 – President Wilhelm Pieck dies and is replaced by the Council of State (a collective head of state)

1961 – Berlin Wall built

1955 1956 1957 1958 1959 1960 1961

By the late 1950s, living standards in the GDR were the highest in the **Eastern bloc**. In 1958, the GDR's government boldly asserted that, within a few years, the superiority of socialist societies would be proven as the GDR's economy would surpass that of the FRG. In 1959, the GDR added its coat of arms to the German flag, symbolising its growing confidence and increasingly separate identity from the FRG.

KEY TERM

Eastern bloc
The name often given to a number of Eastern European 'satellite' states under Communist governments that were allied to the USSR after the Second World War.

EXTEND YOUR KNOWLEDGE

The flag of the GDR



The GDR adopted its own flag in 1959 to deliberately distinguish East Germany from West Germany. The GDR flag included a hammer and compass surrounded by grain, which represented industrial workers, the intelligentsia and agricultural workers. In West Germany, the flag was regarded as unconstitutional and was banned until 1969.

This consolidation of communist rule came at a cost. The size and extent of activity undertaken by the **Ministry for State Security** significantly increased, and a widespread revolt in 1953 led the government to pursue more hard-line communist policies. By the late 1950s, the GDR's continued loss of hundreds of thousands of its citizens to the FRG could no longer be ignored. In 1961, the GDR government ordered the construction of the Berlin Wall. This sealing of the border between East and West Berlin was crucial in the development of the GDR. The government could now undertake economic planning with a guaranteed labour supply, and state security would be much less at risk from Western espionage. Germany's post-war division and therefore the existence of the GDR seemed assured for the foreseeable future.

KEY TERM

Ministry for State Security (Stasi)
The department in the GDR's government that developed a very extensive system of surveillance, formed in 1950. The organisation was commonly referred to as 'The Stasi' or 'The Firm'.

WHY DID EVENTS IN THE YEARS 1945 TO 1949 LEAD TO THE DIVISION OF GERMANY?

During the Second World War, Britain, the USA and the USSR had fought as allies in the Grand Alliance to defeat Nazi Germany. When the war in Europe was over, the most pressing issue facing the Allied leaders was how to deal with post-war Germany. Germany's size meant that it had the potential to become very strong economically, and its geographical position in central Europe made it strategically important. But, in 1945, it was not obvious that, within four years, Germany would find itself divided into two separate states, with one in each of the opposing Cold War camps. In May 1949, the FRG was formally established from the US, British and French zones of occupation, and went on to become firmly allied with Western Europe and the USA. The remaining Soviet zone of occupation then became the GDR in October 1949 and part of the Eastern bloc communist countries controlled by the USSR.

During the Cold War, most Western historians supported one of two explanations for Germany's post-war division. One argument was based on the belief that the FRG was set up to prevent Stalin's aim of establishing Communist control over the whole of Germany. Another interpretation viewed Stalin as only planning for a communist East Germany. Consequently, the FRG was a necessary response to counter Stalin's aims for a separate communist German state.

After the Cold War, historians were able to access a much wider range of archive material from the former GDR and the USSR. The debate then broadened to question whether Stalin had any clear policy towards Germany's future at all, as well as looking at the Western Allies' role in pursuing the rapid creation of an Allied West Germany. Some historians argue that US foreign policy was driven by economic motives in the pursuit of lucrative overseas markets. Germany itself can also be seen as responsible for its division. Some Germans in the Western zones were eager to support rapid integration with an obviously more prosperous West. In the eastern zone, German communists were intent on co-operating with the USSR to build a very different society from that which had been a Nazi state a little more than a decade earlier.

The Soviet zone

In February 1945, the leaders of the 'Big Three' Western powers – the USA, Britain and the USSR – met at Yalta. One of the decisions reached was that, at the end of the Second World War, the USA, Britain and the USSR would each be allocated an occupation zone of Germany as well as a sector of Berlin. The eastern part of Germany would become the USSR's zone of occupation. Within the Soviet zone was Germany's capital, Berlin. The city would be totally surrounded by the Soviet zone of occupation, which meant that the Western Allies would only have access to their sectors of Berlin by passing through the Soviet zone. The three powers met again after Germany's surrender at Potsdam in July 1945. Here it was also decided that each power would be able to take reparations from its zone of occupation as compensation for war damage.

These decisions were implemented in the first few months following Germany's defeat. Four roads, two railway lines and three air corridors linked the Western sectors of Berlin with their zones of occupation within Germany. Stalin also began the ruthless extraction of reparations from the Soviet zone, which he regarded as justified given the USSR's huge losses – an estimated 25 million Soviet lives and the destruction of a huge amount of Soviet territory. Both of these decisions were an immediate source of growing tension between the Western powers and the USSR. The West's access to their sectors of Berlin was clearly dependent on the USSR, and the extent of reparations taken from the Soviet zone of occupation was regarded by the Western powers as detrimental to the zone's economic and political development.

The creation of the Socialist Unity Party (SED)

On 30 April 1945, just days before the end of the war in Europe, a group of German communists led by Walter Ulbricht (known as the **Ulbricht Group**) arrived in Berlin. For most of the period of the **Third Reich**, the group's members had been in exile in Moscow. Their first priority was to try to ensure that the KPD (the German Communist Party) controlled as many key local administrative positions as possible and to encourage popular support for the party. However, by the local elections that summer, it was clear that the SPD (the German Social Democratic Party) had far more popular support than the KPD could ever hope to achieve. It was unlikely that a political party regarded by many Germans as a tool of the Soviets would ever have any significant appeal. This was due to various factors that included the intense anti-Soviet propaganda of the Nazi government, and the Soviet Army's widespread looting and raping of German women that had occurred during the final months of the Second World War.

EXTEND YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Walter Ulbricht (1893–1973)

Ulbricht was born in Leipzig in 1893, where his father was a tailor. During the First World War he served as a soldier in the German Army on the Eastern Front. He joined the German Communist Party in 1920, but left Germany in 1933 when the Nazis came to power. He eventually settled in exile in the USSR from 1937 to 1945.

During the Second World War he worked for the Soviet authorities, interrogating captured German army officers for the Red Army and making anti-Nazi propaganda for the USSR.

Ulbricht took over the leadership of the KPD on his return to Germany in April 1945. Its previous leader, Ernst Thälmann, had been shot dead on Hitler's orders at Buchenwald concentration camp in 1944.

As General Secretary of the ruling SED party, he became the most powerful individual in the GDR and directly ordered the building of the Berlin Wall. His goatee beard, unfashionable at the time, was taken as a sign of his devotion to Lenin. He remained in power until 1971.

In April 1946, 600,000 KPD members and nearly 700,000 members of the SPD merged to form the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED). The very next day saw the first edition of the SED newspaper, *Neues Deutschland*. This controversial merger came about as a result of Soviet pressure on the SPD to disband and a general desire to avoid having two left-wing political parties competing for votes. As well as splitting the left-wing vote, many Germans regarded the failure of the KPD and SPD to co-operate in the early 1930s as a major reason why the Nazis had been able to achieve power.

However, SED leaders swiftly ensured that this new political party was dominated by communists. There was a purge of SED members who had been former politicians and supporters of the pre-Second World War SPD. In 1948, only two years after its formation, the SED officially stated its commitment to Marxist-Leninist principles. By 1950, approximately 5,000 former SPD members had been arrested and sent to Soviet prisons.

KEY TERMS

Ulbricht Group
A group of German communists who were trained in the USSR to prepare for the spread of communism in Germany after the Second World War. They were, therefore, communists who were loyal to Moscow.

Third Reich
The name used by the Nazi Party for the period when they formed the government of Germany. This period lasted from 1933 until 1945.

SOURCE 1 Helga Gottesbühren, born in 1951, reminiscing in 2014 about her personal memories of living in Reinsdorf, a small village near Wittenberg in the GDR.

After the end of the Second World War, my parents were young and full of ideals for the future and what it should be like. They wanted to help build a new Germany and they were determined a war should never start again. They applied to do a teaching degree since many teachers were needed. At this time the SED political party was well-established. The aims of the SED party were very consistent with both my parents' beliefs and so they had decided to join the party. Together with many other like-minded residents of the village, they started to make our village a better place. For example, a new school and a children's nursery and much more were built. When I turned 18, I wanted to join the SED. I was shocked when told that because my parents were teachers and belonged to the intelligentsia the ratio of workers in the party would no longer be guaranteed by people like me.

AS Level Exam-Style Question Section A

Study Source 1 before you answer this question.

Why is Source 1 valuable to the historian for an enquiry into the reasons why people supported the SED in the 1940s?

Explain your answer using the source, the information given about it and your own knowledge of the historical context. (8 marks)

Tip:
What inferences can you make about the reasons why people supported the SED? How could you use your own knowledge to develop and explain these reasons?

Growing divisions among the victor powers

In the summer of 1945, the US, British and Soviet heads of government met at Potsdam, near Berlin, for a post-war conference. It was clear that relations between these powers were becoming strained, and areas of disagreement between the Western allies and the USSR soon emerged. This was partly due to the death of US President Roosevelt in April 1945 and the outlook of his more anti-communist successor, Truman.

One particular source of tension was the USSR's demands for reparations, which were regarded by the Western Allies as excessive and likely to hamper Germany's economic recovery. The Western Allies believed a weak economy and low living standards would increase the appeal of communism. Another major disagreement was the location of Germany's eastern border with communist Poland. The Western Allies viewed Stalin's preferred location as too far west, giving Poland territory that contained millions of displaced Germans. This issue remained unresolved at the end of the conference and it was agreed to come to a decision at a future meeting. The decision was never taken, and it was not until 1990 that the question of the German-Polish border was finally settled.

Whether by deliberate design or by historical accident, the occupation zones developed in very different ways. From 1947 onwards, contrasting economic policies pursued by the Allies in their individual zones began to reveal what Germany's future might look like. It was inevitable that the zones would grow further apart as relations between the superpowers began to rapidly deteriorate and what is often regarded as the first Cold War crisis occurred over Berlin in 1948.

Bizonia and the Truman Doctrine

In January 1947, after almost a year of secret negotiations, the US and British governments announced their decision to merge their zones into one economic unit that became known as Bizonia.

Stalin regarded this as the first deliberate step by Britain and the USA towards the creation of an independent, capitalist West German state. He argued that the measures to develop economic unity between zones should have been discussed beforehand with both the USSR and France. Then, in March, US President Truman announced his policy of **containment** and what became known as the **Truman Doctrine**. This would require stable and prosperous states in Western Europe. Three months later, the USA announced significant amounts of financial aid for war-damaged Europe with the Marshall Plan, the economic policy to directly support the Truman Doctrine.

KEY TERMS

Containment
A key principle in US foreign policy after the Second World War to prevent the spread of communism. It reflected US concerns about the USSR's increasing power and influence over Eastern Europe, as well as in China, parts of South East Asia and Africa.

Truman Doctrine
In 1947, US President Truman established the policy that the USA would provide political, military and economic support to all democratic nations that were under threat from communism, either from within their own country or from other nations.

EXTEND YOUR KNOWLEDGE

The Marshall Plan
In 1948, the US government made large sums of money available to countries in Europe to help them recover from the Second World War. The US believed that increasing prosperity would prevent the spread of communism.

In total, the Marshall Plan allocated $13 billion to various states in Western Europe. The plan was willingly accepted by many states and undoubtedly contributed to West Germany's post-war economic miracle. It also demonstrated that US policy towards Germany had changed. Rather than actively wanting to punish and humiliate a defeated power, the USA now wanted to actively support the rebuilding of a prosperous state.

In June 1948, after more months of secret planning, Britain and the USA announced the introduction of a new currency, the Deutschmark (DM), into the Western zones of occupied Germany and the Western sectors of Berlin. Economically, the new currency was seen as essential in order to successfully boost trade, increase industrial production and eradicate the extensive black market, but it had serious political consequences. For the USSR, the currency

reform was an act of aggression. The Soviets regarded it as a deliberate strategy by the West to undermine the Soviet zone by disrupting Berlin's economic unity and disregarding the principle of joint Allied decision-making over Germany.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

Causes of division between the victors

1 What were the key differences between the USSR and the Western powers in relation to how Germany should develop after 1945?

2 Why did the USSR's view of Germany differ from that of the Western powers?

The Berlin Airlift

Six days after the new currency was introduced into Bizonia, a serious crisis developed over Berlin that would severely test relations between the superpowers. The Western Allies' implementation of currency reform led directly to the USSR putting considerable pressure on the Western powers' very presence in West Berlin.

Since the establishment of Bizonia, the USSR had increasingly frustrated the West's access to their own sectors in Berlin, with sudden road blocks and train diversions. Now Stalin intended to impose a total blockade of West Berlin as a means of coercing the West into surrendering their sectors, creating a united Berlin in the Soviet zone. On 23 June, the USSR severed all rail, road and canal links from West Berlin to the Western zones. The Western allies were faced with the problem of how to maintain access to West Berlin and supply food, fuel and medical supplies to its population of two million. Eventually, the USA and Britain decided that, despite significant risks, an airlift could supply West Berlin.

The airlift began on 26 June and, at its height, aircraft landed in West Berlin every 90 seconds and delivered 8,000 tonnes of supplies each day. The operation was carried out with ill-equipped planes, poor runways and crews working long hours in very dangerous conditions. International relations became even more strained with the USA's deployment of fighter planes in Britain that were rumoured to be carrying atomic bombs. It later transpired that this was deliberate misinformation by the Allies in an attempt to persuade Stalin to back down. For those living in West Berlin, the blockade meant almost a year of scarce supplies and frequent Soviet propaganda that the Western powers were suddenly going to abandon the airlift. Eventually, in May 1949, after 322 days, more than 277,000 flights and five million packages of charity donations from the US public, Stalin called off the blockade.

Impact of the airlift and the formation of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG)

In many ways, the Berlin Airlift became the defining event of the early Cold War. It displayed the West's commitment to protecting the population and maintaining their military presence in West Berlin. Berlin itself was transformed from being viewed as the centre of the recent Nazi state to instead representing Western democratic values that the USA and Britain were determined to defend. Although the Berlin Airlift had ended peacefully, it had important repercussions for relations between the West and the USSR.

Following the Berlin Airlift, the Western Allies decided to co-ordinate their armed forces. This was a fundamental reason for the creation of **NATO**.

KEY TERM

NATO
The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was established by Western European countries and North America in 1949 to unite member nations for collective security against the USSR. West Germany became a member in 1955.

During the Berlin Airlift, the Western powers had continued preparations for the formation of an economically secure German state allied to the West. The USSR appeared much less certain or deliberately evasive over its intentions for Germany's future. Stalin still gave the appearance at least of supporting the formation of a united, demilitarised Germany. However, many Western politicians believed that the USSR's real aims were for the eventual establishment of a united, communist Germany.

Within the Western zones there was considerable support for Konrad Adenauer, the leader of the new Christian Democratic Union (CDU) political party. He supported the rapid setting up of a West German state, fully integrated with the West, even if, in the process, it meant sacrificing the Soviet zone of occupation. Whereas, in the very immediate post-war years, it had been the USSR implementing the most radical changes within occupied Germany, it was now the Western Allies who were pressing ahead to be the first to set up a new state out of their zones of occupation. The new West German state came into existence in May 1949 as the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), and Adenauer was elected its first chancellor that summer.

SOURCE 2 US planes deliver supplies to West Berlin during the Berlin Blockade.



EXTEND YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Konrad Adenauer (1876–1967)

Konrad Adenauer had been the mayor of the city of Cologne (1917–33). During the Nazi period he was imprisoned due to his opposition to the regime. After the Second World War he became the leader of the new CDU political party.

In 1949, Adenauer became the FRG's first chancellor, with a majority secured by just one vote, and if he had been ousted from the chancellorship the post-war history of Germany could have been very different. While some Germans supported his policy for the creation of an FRG that was firmly allied to the Western powers, many others resented what they regarded as his abandonment of the Soviet zone, even though his political party remained committed to pursuing the reuniting of Germany.

Formation of the GDR, 1949

Following the setting up of the FRG, a meeting in Moscow in August 1949 made arrangements for a German state to be established in the Soviet zone. Much of this new state's fundamental economic and social structures had already been shaped with the extensive measures implemented immediately after the Second World War. The SED already had a dominant influence in domestic politics; significant amounts of the zone's industry had been nationalised; and far-reaching reform of agricultural land had been carried out.

Four months after the FRG had come into existence, the GDR was formally set up, in October 1949. Ulbricht became First Secretary of the SED's most senior policy-making committee – the Politburo. His position was the most powerful in the GDR government.

Although smaller and with less industry than the FRG, the GDR had the prestige of a government that operated from Berlin. However, only the USSR, the Eastern bloc states and North Korea would enter into diplomatic relations with the GDR when it was first formed. Many Western states refused to acknowledge the state's existence until the 1970s, and it was often referred to within the FRG as 'the zone', or with inverted commas disparagingly placed around the name GDR.

Even three years after the setting up of two separate German states, Stalin was suggesting that a reunited Germany could be formed. In April 1952, Stalin wrote what became known as his 'Note' to the Western powers in which he put forward the idea of a united Germany. The Western powers dismissed the 1952 Stalin 'Note' and, within one month, the GDR announced it would begin to develop its own armed forces.

EXTEND YOUR KNOWLEDGE

The Stalin 'Note'

The 1952 Stalin 'Note' has been subject to considerable controversy. It has been argued that it was a missed opportunity for the reunification of Germany, stemming from Stalin's desire to prevent West Germany's rearmament, or a means for the USSR to gradually increase its influence over central Europe. Others have viewed it as a mere propaganda tool, for Stalin to be cast in the role of a peacemaker, or that Stalin knew it would be rejected and so could then justify rearmament by the GDR.

Conclusion

By the end of 1949, it was clear that the division of Germany, which had been viewed by the superpowers as a temporary measure in 1945, was to become a more permanent feature of the post-war settlement. The creation of two German states was not the result of demands from the German population; in fact, the vast majority of the German population viewed the division of Germany with dismay. The development of two states was predominantly the result of increasing divisions within the victorious powers relating to the future of Germany. The relationship between Stalin and Truman had broken down in an atmosphere of suspicion and mistrust. As each wished to impose their own ideology onto their respective zones of Germany, there was little chance of agreement. For Stalin, the imposition of socialism on the Soviet sector of Germany was a necessary development to meet the security needs of the USSR. It would strengthen the barrier against capitalism, as well as ensuring fascism did not rise again. To the USA, their zones would act as a barrier to the further spread of communism directed by the USSR, as well as providing a market for American goods. The only likely alternative was to retain a united, but neutral, Germany. The growing tensions and suspicion between the superpowers rendered this impossible. The Berlin Crisis of 1948-49 cemented the process of division between the superpowers and, with it, the division of Germany into two states. It was in this context that the GDR was established. Although proposals for German reunification were put on the negotiating table, the continued hostility between the superpowers made progress towards this goal impossible.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

Explanations of the post-war division of Germany

1 Why did the post-war division of Germany occur?

2 What role did Stalin play in the post-war division of Germany?

3 What role was played by the West (USA and Britain)?

4 How far do you agree that the post-war division of Germany was the result of irreconcilable differences between the superpowers?

TO WHAT EXTENT WAS THE SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT IN THE GDR DEMOCRATIC?

The original 1949 GDR constitution was intentionally designed to be compatible with that of the FRG so that, if Germany did reunite, the system of government could be established as easily as possible. The GDR's constitution claimed that fundamental human rights, such as freedom of speech and the freedom of the press, were guaranteed. The system of government was seen as democratic; elections were held and there was a choice of political parties; voting was by secret ballot and there was

proportional representation. However, the reality of the system of government was very different in practice.

KEY TERM

Proportional representation
The system of deciding the number of members of parliament that each political party gets based on the proportion of votes it receives.

SOURCE 3

Victor Klemperer's diaries were published in 1995 and they are an account of his life in Germany from the Weimar Period until near his death in 1960. After the Second World War, Klemperer settled in the GDR. He worked as a languages lecturer and was a delegate to the *Volkskammer* as a part of one of the mass organisations – the Cultural Association.

1949, 12th October, Wednesday evening.

The German Democratic Republic. There's been nothing else on the wireless since yesterday. The presidential election, the parades, the speeches. I do not feel comfortable with it. I know how everything is fixed and how spontaneity and unanimity are prepared. I know that under the Nazis it sounded just the same and proceeded in just the same way. I know how little reality there is behind it. 20 million are not even a third of the German people and of the 20 million at least 12 are anti-Soviet. I know that internally the Democratic Republic is a lie, the SED supports and desires a Socialist Republic, it does not trust the middle-class parties, and the middle-class parties distrust it. At some point there will be a civil war... I am counted one of the Russian lackeys.

AS Level Exam-Style Question Section A

Study Source 3 before you answer this question.

How much weight do you give the evidence of Source 3 for an enquiry into the political system established in the GDR in 1949?

Explain your answer using the source, the information given about it and your own knowledge of the historical context. (12 marks)

Tip:
Think about whether Victor Klemperer is making a valid point about the nature of the political system in the GDR. Use your own knowledge to support/challenge his view. How does the origin and purpose of this source affect the weight you might give it as evidence?

The head of state

Initially, the GDR constitution included a head of state, known as president or prime minister, but with a purely ceremonial role, and the position was only ever held by Wilhelm Pieck. Like Ulbricht, Pieck had been in exile in the USSR for most of the duration of the Third Reich and returned to Germany in 1945. He played a major role in the formation of the SED and became prime minister when the GDR was set up in 1949. When he died in 1960, the position was abolished and replaced by the *Staatsrat* or Council of State, which was chaired by the SED leader.

The *Volkskammer* (People's Chamber)

In the original 1949 constitution, elections were to be held every four years. The first elections were held in 1952, but the 500 members of the *Volkskammer* – who represented the people – were not elected in the Western sense of democracy. The GDR, unlike the USSR, allowed other political parties to exist. Among the parties allowed were the Liberal Democratic Party and the Farmers' Party, and each was able to put forward candidates for elections. This gave an outward appearance of democracy, but there was no contest in elections between parties. The number of seats for each political party were predetermined by the SED before the election, so the actual outcome was already decided. Obviously, the largest number of seats were allocated to the SED to maintain its leading role. Most of the other political parties also had to accept control by the SED in what was known as the 'national bloc' of political parties. The *Volkskammer* also included representatives of the mass organisations, such as the Free German Youth (FDJ), Free German Trade Union Federation and the Democratic Women's Federation, which were all co-ordinated as a 'National Front of the GDR'.

Election results always gave the appearance that members were elected by the democratic will of the people. Turnouts in elections were very high, often over 90 percent, but this was in reality a reflection of the fact that voting was compulsory and there were fines, or even prison sentences, for those who failed to vote. The overwhelming approval that elections seemed to confer on those elected was also a product of the method used to vote. A voter simply took the ballot paper, which contained only one name, and dropped it into the ballot box. If a voter did not wish to approve the candidate, they would cross out the candidate's name, but they had to do so in a separate voting booth without any secrecy. The consequences for such an act of defiance could be severe – loss of one's job or expulsion from university, and close surveillance by the secret police. Thus, the elections did not provide a way of removing a government or even altering the balance within it. The only way of voting for an alternative was with one's feet and leaving the country, until the Berlin Wall was built in 1961.

To give the appearance that the *Volkskammer* was a body made up of a coalition of differing political organisations, the President of the *Volkskammer* was usually from a party other than the SED. The first President, Johannes Dieckmann, who was a member of the Liberal Democratic Party, served from 1949 to 1969.

The *Volkskammer* passed legislation, but this was predominantly a ratifying function, approving laws already decided by the Politburo of the SED. A sign of its relative lack of power was the fact that it met only for a few days each year.

The *Länderkammer* (States Chamber)

The *Länderkammer* represented the five historic German states (*Länder*) within the GDR. It was made up of representatives from the assemblies of the different *Länder* and operated on the same principles as the *Volkskammer*, with representatives chosen from a range of political parties on a predetermined basis and with the SED dominant. Its role was that of an upper house: it had the power to suggest new laws and veto any of the laws approved by

the *Volkskammer*. In practice, it acted as another rubber-stamp for laws already decided by the Politburo and never used its power of veto.

The increasing differences in the development of the GDR and the FRG led to the five *Länder* being abolished in 1952. They were replaced with 14 *Bezirke* (districts), each of which was under the control of an SED officer. These smaller regions made it easier for central government to repress any dissent and prevent any strongholds of regional power. In 1958, the *Länderkammer*, surplus to SED requirements, was abolished.

The dominance of the SED and its General Secretary, Ulbricht

In Marxist-Leninist theory, the SED's role was to guide society through the transitional phase – when the established capitalist order would be gradually replaced by a socialist society. During this phase, the SED needed to maintain control of government and society. Therefore, certain rights – such as the freedom of speech, the right to strike and freedom of religion – were subordinate to the SED's stated aim of the building of socialism.

The structure of the SED was based on the principle that it represented the people of the GDR.

Party Congresses

Party members in local and regional branches elected representatives to Party Congresses, where issues could be raised. The lack of influence exerted by Party Congresses is reflected in the fact that there were only four during the period 1950–63. The chief function of the Congress, however, was to elect members to the Central Committee of the Party.

The Central Committee

This was a smaller body of about 80 to 130 members; the exact number varied over the years. Although it was, in theory, the main decision-making body of the SED, the Central Committee was considered by the Party to be too large to function effectively. Therefore, the Central Committee delegated decision-making to the much smaller Politburo. As a result, the Central Committee only met periodically.

The Politburo

The Politburo was the policy-making committee of the SED, and this was where most political power and decision-making lay. It was chaired by the Party's First Secretary. The Politburo was often referred to by the general population as the 'Council of Gods', a term that did not always reflect a positive view of its relationship with the general population. The principle of **democratic centralism** meant that decision-making passed down from the Politburo to carefully selected SED officials in regional areas and then continued to local levels, such as the workplace and residential blocks. This structure could allow the Politburo to appear to represent the people and it did provide a channel for views and opinions to reach the higher levels of the Party. In reality, however, it acted more as an instrument for imposing orders from the Politburo on the population.

KEY TERM

Democratic centralism
A Marxist-Leninist concept that claims democracy is achieved by the people giving central government the authority to make decisions.

The most important day-to-day work of the Central Committee was undertaken by the Politburo, a small circle of senior party officers, comprising between 15 and 25 members, along with approximately ten non-voting candidate members. The Politburo members included approximately ten Central Committee Secretaries. The country's government, formally headed by the Council of Ministers, was required only to implement the decisions of the Politburo. This meant that the Council of Ministers was under the permanent control of the Party Committees, a structure that ensured the 'leading role of the Party', a role that had been implicit in the constitution of the GDR. The chairman of the Council of Ministers and the President of the *Volkskammer* were also members of the Politburo.

Party organisations

The power and influence of the Party extended to the general population through the creation of social organisations, each under the control of party officials at both national and local level. The most important of these included the Free German Youth (FDJ), the German Gymnastics and Sports Association (DTSB) and the Democratic Women's Federation (DFD). Thus, the dominance of the SED covered virtually all aspects of life. These organisations had large memberships: 75 percent of young people joined the FDJ, and the German Gymnastics and Sports Association had 2.8 million members by 1970, out of a population of 17 million. These organisations allowed the SED to give the impression of mass participation.

The dominance of Ulbricht

Walter Ulbricht dominated politics within the GDR from 1950 to 1971.

- Ulbricht's position and power was based on the fact that he was Moscow's man. His years training in the USSR had given him a sense of the importance of loyalty to the USSR. In his early years, he relied on the support of those who had formed part of the 'Ulbricht Group' in Moscow. As the GDR was a product of Soviet foreign policy and its deterioration in relations with the West, Ulbricht knew that his position depended on him carrying out the wishes of the USSR. His slavish devotion to the Soviet Union bordered on the obsessive, his favourite slogan being 'To learn from the Soviet Union is to learn victory'.
- The basis of his power over the SED also lay with the positions he held. He was First Secretary of the Party, giving him control over the Central Committee and the power to set agendas for meetings. The position also gave him the role of Chairman of the Politburo.
- To secure his position, Ulbricht used the SED's internal disputes of the early 1950s as opportunities to suppress those with differing views, and mass purges took place in 1951 and between 1956 and 1958. By the end of the 1950s, Ulbricht's

position had been clearly secured, with a younger generation of loyal SED members and more party political control of the legal system, the police and armed forces, and the development of the Stasi.

- His immense personal power increased further with the building of the Berlin Wall, which gave his position even more security.
- A cult of personality was developed, which encouraged the adoration of Ulbricht and his achievements (see Source 4). This was a hard task; he had little charisma. Seen as inflexible and unlikeable, even by his close colleagues, Ulbricht was, nonetheless, intelligent and shrewd. He was a politician who knew how to work the party apparatus to his advantage.

Ulbricht's position within the Party was secure, but not all East Germans bought into the image of Ulbricht as a great leader. In 1950, Ulbricht was pelted with tomatoes by a football crowd in Dresden. Ulbricht had been guest of honour at the final match of the football season between Dresden-Friedrichstadt (a privately run club) and Zwickau (a club of a workers' co-operative). To ensure a politically correct result in front of the Party leader, the referee declared that Zwickau had won 5-1, a result that bore no resemblance to the actual number of goals scored. The crowd took out their anger on Ulbricht; the Dresden football team voted with their feet and left for West Germany.

It was not until the late 1960s that the Party started to question Ulbricht as leader. His position was to become gradually eroded due to a combination of his own fading health and the actions of Honecker, Secretary for the Economy, who increasingly began to undermine Ulbricht's role.

SOURCE 4 Members of the FDJ, the youth organisation of the SED, carrying a placard of Ulbricht during a parade in East Berlin in 1954.



SOURCE 5 Heinz Lippmann, a Free German Youth officer, describes a Politburo meeting in the early 1950s.

> At the start of the meeting, Ulbricht would ask: 'Does anyone have any objections to the agenda?' Most of the time there were none. Then Ulbricht would read the first item, e.g. 'spring planting,' recommend some changes in the proposal, which would be recorded, and then ask, 'Are there other suggestions?' Since no one besides the Politburo member whose department was directly concerned with the question had read the proposal, there was usually no discussion, and a decision would be made that agreed with Ulbricht's original opinion.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE

The GDR as a democracy

1 In what way does the name 'German Democratic Republic' give a distorted impression of the system of government in East Germany?

2 Look at Sources 4 and 5. How useful are these sources as evidence of the ways in which the SED exercised control?

Conclusion

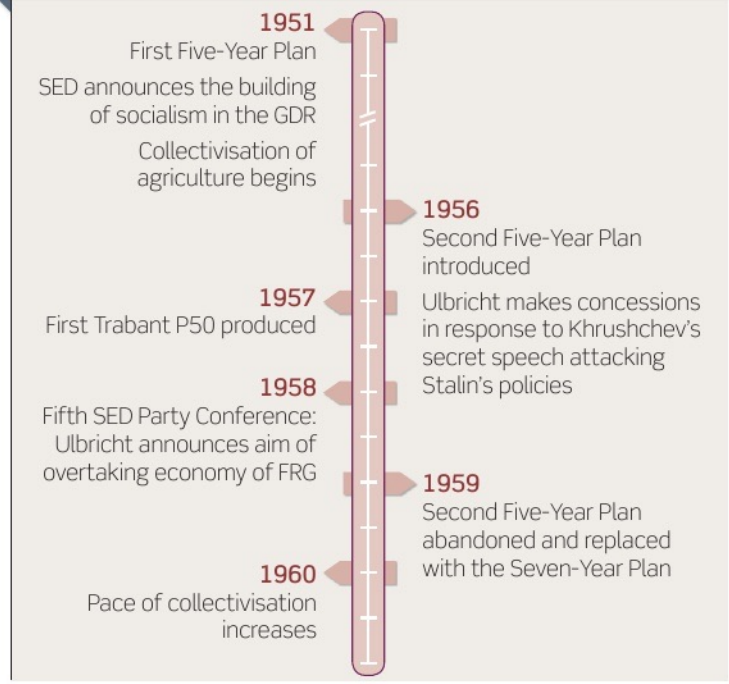
To all outward appearances, the constitution of the GDR displayed the features of a democracy: it had established a range of representative bodies that played a role in the drafting, ratifying and implementation of laws. It proclaimed itself as the state of the German workers and peasants. Yet the reality was that power rested in the hands of the SED and, within the Party, this power was concentrated in the hands of the Politburo. The result is that many historians have viewed the GDR as a dictatorship of the SED. As the master of the Party apparatus, Walter Ulbricht was able to exert a firm hold over the direction of policy, but he was in many ways a puppet of his masters in Moscow. The policies introduced to develop the economy of East Germany were to illustrate this situation.

HOW SUCCESSFUL WAS THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE GDR'S ECONOMY IN THE YEARS 1949–61?

The GDR faced serious obstacles to its aim of developing a socialist economy. It suffered lasting damage as a result of the Second World War. Berlin lay in ruins by the end of the war. Dresden, one of East Germany's largest and most beautiful cities before the war, had been devastated by British and American bombing in February 1945. Its ancient city centre was laid to waste. Other cities, such as Leipzig and Magdeburg, were also heavily damaged. The impact of this damage was to severely reduce the prospects of economic growth in the Eastern zone of Germany due to the fact that it contained so few industrial areas. This contrasted with West Germany, which contained the Rhineland and the Saar coalfield, both large and important centres of industry. Both the Russians and the Americans had seized many of the best scientists in Germany after the war, such as Werner

von Braun, whose expertise in rocket science was put to use by the US government.

TIMELINE OF ECONOMIC POLICY



The USSR's seizure of reparations from 1945

By the end of the Second World War, the USSR had lost an estimated 20 million lives and had suffered widespread damage to its industrial infrastructure. The USSR's steel output in 1945, for example, was half that of the late 1930s. Stalin's demand for high levels of reparation was based on the urgent need to rebuild the Soviet economy. The USSR's policy appears to have been to extract as much as possible from the Soviet zone while they could.

The Allied powers had managed to reach an agreement on the amount of reparations, which was set at the sum of $20 billion, but they disagreed on the means and timescale for the payments to be made. The final decision was that each of the occupying powers could take reparations from their own zone, with the USSR being permitted an additional ten percent from the Western zones in return for the Soviet zone delivering food to them. The USSR's extractions from its zone included the dismantling of factories and transport infrastructure, payments from actual production within the zone and contributions demanded for the costs of Soviet occupation. There were also special 'trophy' brigades that seized gold and silver, as well as pieces of art, furniture and clothes.

It is estimated that around 1,500 entire industrial plants and half of all the East German railway tracks were taken from the Soviet zone into the USSR. Occasional problems, such as damage to equipment while being transported to the USSR and difficulties in reassembling complex industrial plants, were partly alleviated by either taking German experts to the USSR or leaving the actual equipment in Germany and then appropriating manufactured products. This stripping of so many resources from the Soviet zone is often used to support the argument that Stalin was neither planning for nor expecting Germany to be permanently divided; the USSR was extracting what was available while it was still possible to do so.

Reparations placed a heavy burden on the Soviet zone and had a detrimental effect on its economy. Much of the goodwill from those Germans who regarded the USSR as liberating them from the horrors of the Third Reich was outweighed by popular hostility to falling living standards and the maltreatment of those Germans employed in the dismantling operations. It was not until 1953 that the USSR announced that reparations would cease from 1 January 1954.

Socialist economics and planning

The SED's commitment to Soviet economics and planning was based on ideological conviction. The Soviets and German communists believed Nazism, as a fascist ideology, had been the inevitable product of the later stages of capitalist society. Therefore, according to Marxist ideology, the social and economic conditions regarded as responsible for fascism needed to be eradicated.

The aim was to transform the GDR into a Marxist-Leninist state. This would require abolishing the land-owning class, private business and small farmers. In their place, central planning would ensure the nationalisation of industry and the collectivisation of agriculture. Even before the formal establishment of the GDR, the SED had laid the foundations for the **Centralised Planned Economy** based on a Stalinist model, with its declaration for the Planned Construction of Socialism. Once the GDR was established, a State Planning Commission was established to plan and supervise the implementation of Five-Year Plans that were modelled on Stalinism.

The GDR's economy was significantly hindered for several reasons.

- Germany's post-war division meant that the GDR no longer had access to important supplies of coal and steel from the **Ruhr** area, which was now part of the FRG.
- Until 1950, the USSR continued to take as reparations 25 percent of all industrial goods produced in the GDR.
- The GDR continued to lose valuable labour to the FRG through continued migration.

KEY TERMS

Centralised Planned Economy
The principle of the government directing the economy from a planning apparatus based in Berlin. It was designed to ensure that the economy of the GDR produced the full range of products it needed, but was often inflexible and did little to encourage initiative at local level.

Ruhr
This area of north-west Germany consists of several large cities and is the country's biggest and most important industrial area. With the post-war division of Germany, it became part of the FRG and was a key area of West Germany's economic boom in the 1950s and 1960s.

Nonetheless, from 1950 onwards, industries in the GDR were given targets in Five-Year Plans modelled on Stalin's industrialisation of the USSR. These plans were drawn up by central government and gave ambitious production targets to different areas of industry and agriculture. According to communist-led governments, such central planning would then ensure the country's overall economic development.

Industrial developments

The First Five-Year Plan (1951–55)

The Third Party Congress of the SED, which met in July 1950, emphasised the need for industrial progress and resulted in the launching of the First Five-Year Plan the following year. The Plan introduced centralised state planning, with high production quotas for heavy industry.

The First Five-Year Plan accelerated the move to the **nationalisation** of industry. Industries and factories were taken over and formed into **People's Enterprises**. This process covered 75 percent of the industrial sector. The private sector was severely reduced to cover only small-scale, and often highly specialist, production. The Plan emphasised the expansion of heavy industry, but it faced the prospect of trying to achieve this with severe shortages of technology and equipment. Part of the solution was to try to meet production targets by increasing labour productivity. The Plan was launched with a propaganda fanfare. The miner, Adolf Hennecke, was used as a role model. Hennecke was celebrated by the SED as a communist hero when he increased his daily output of coal by nearly 400 percent, and East German workers were encouraged to match his achievements.

The First Five-Year Plan produced significant increases in the production of lignite (brown coal), electricity, iron and cement, although both coal and steel production fell a long way short of the targets (see Source 6).

Although the First Five-Year Plan might be viewed as an overall success, with targets in some areas being exceeded, there were some fundamental problems. Workers were put under immense pressure to work hard and for long hours. This, together with a lack of consumer goods, led to widespread dissatisfaction with the government. The pressures of the plan caused an exodus of GDR citizens to West Germany. Overall, there was insufficient investment in modern technology and an emphasis on quantity produced rather than quality, which meant there was unlikely to be any penetration into Western markets.

KEY TERMS

Nationalisation
The state taking over ownership of businesses. This was a key element in socialist economic planning.

People's Enterprise (VEB)
A nationalised factory and industrial centre that was run by the government. These were organised on the socialist principle of workers' brigades, groups of workers who shared responsibility for ensuring their targets were met.

SOURCE 6

The figures below show levels of industrial production in the GDR for the First Five-Year Plan. Taken from G. Layton, *Democracy and Dictatorship in Germany* (2009).

These statistics are based on those compiled by the government of the GDR.

Product	1950	1955 Plan target	1955 actual
Coal	2,800	3,500	2,700
Lignite (brown coal)	137,000	205,000	201,000
Electricity	19,000	32,000	29,000
Iron	340	1,250	1,500
Steel	1,000	3,000	2,500
Cement	1,400	2,600	3,000

The Second Five-Year Plan (1956–59)

The Second Five-Year Plan was launched in 1956, with the title 'Modernisation, Mechanisation and Automation'. This Plan focused more on consumer goods and improving living standards. It also included the development of nuclear energy, and the first nuclear reactor in the GDR was activated in 1957.

The management of the economy underwent a major reform in February 1958. Centralised control was tightened by the SED when it transferred a large number of industrial ministries to the State Planning Commission. This was accompanied by a further acceleration in the nationalisation of

industry. The SED offered entrepreneurs 50 percent partnership incentives for transforming their firms into People's Enterprises. At the close of 1960, private enterprise controlled only nine percent of total industrial production. For small-scale producers, often those in workshops, **Production Co-operatives** were formed, bringing one-third of craft-workers under state control by 1960, a rise from six percent in 1958.

Ulbricht's proclamation in 1958 that the GDR needed to overtake the FRG led to the Plan being abandoned, and a new Seven-Year Plan was launched in 1959. This integrated the GDR's economy more with that of the USSR. The Plan's ambitious targets included increases of almost 200 percent in the manufacture of consumer goods, and led to Ulbricht's optimistic assertion that the GDR's economy would surpass that of the FRG within the next few years – a claim that was undoubtedly encouraged by Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev's announcement that the USSR was on course to overtake the USA. These claims proved to be hopelessly over-optimistic. Although there was an increase in the production of consumer goods, the impact of the Plan on living standards was undermined by the attempts to increase worker productivity by 85 percent.

Agricultural collectivisation

There was widespread resentment towards the **Junker** social class, who were seen as having played a significant part in the rise of the Nazis, as well as having a long history of exploiting agricultural workers. One of the most popular reforms carried out very early on in the Soviet zone was making Junker landowners with more than 100 hectares forfeit their land. This land was then redistributed to peasants, small farmers and refugees. In total, about one-third of the GDR's entire farmland was reallocated to more than 500,000 beneficiaries. At this stage, however, owners of small and medium-sized farms were allowed to keep possession of their land, a deliberate government policy to prevent significant opposition.

Although the immediate post-war land reforms had been largely popular, overall agricultural production suffered. This was due to a lack of machinery and livestock, resentment at some forced requisitioning of food, and the lack of farming experience by many of those who had been given land. These problems led to a significant number of farmers simply abandoning their land.

By the late 1940s, falling agricultural production had become a serious concern for the SED. Further, for a communist-planned economy, **collectivisation** of agriculture was a key principle. In 1952, the SED began voluntary collectivisation in an attempt to increase food supplies, with a more efficient use of rural workers and machinery. Yet, within six years, only one-third of GDR farmland had been collectivised. The very nature of collectivisation was an incentive to those with relatively small farms, who could envisage real financial benefits and gains, whereas it alienated larger-scale farmers who stood to lose large amounts of their land. The dissatisfaction of rural workers is evident in the disproportionately high number of 15,000 farmers who emigrated to the FRG during the early 1950s.

KEY TERMS

Production Co-operative
A group of craft-workers who were encouraged to work together under the direction of the state.

Junker
The class of wealthy German aristocratic landowners who owned large areas of land, especially in the eastern parts of Germany.

Collectivisation
The forcible taking over by the state of privately owned farms, which are then joined together to make larger units of land. Collective farms allowed the sharing of machinery, property and livestock to be organised.

Economic demands and a more secure political position led Ulbricht to push forward with a second attempt at collectivisation in early 1960, with what became known as the 'Socialist spring'. This was enforced by denying reluctant farmers access to collective machinery and through high targets. Individuals who continued to oppose local SED functionaries were frequently arrested and their land was forcibly taken by the state. However, the short-term impact of collectivisation was a disaster in terms of agricultural output. This can be seen with rapidly falling crop yields, which between 1960 and 1961 fell by 30 percent. The fall in productivity was in many ways due to a sharp rise in the number of farm workers migrating west. In 1961, this led to the introduction of rationing of some food items.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

The economic development of the GDR
How successful were developments in the following during the period c1949–61?

1 Agriculture.

2 Industry.

SOURCE 7

The statistics below show the number of collective farms and the total percentage of farmland that had been collectivised between 1952 and 1960. Taken from G. Layton, *Democracy and Dictatorship in Germany* (2009).

Year	Number of collective farms	Farm land (%)
1952	1,900	3
1954	5,100	14
1956	6,300	23
1958	9,600	37
1960	19,300	84

SOURCE 8 R. Havemann, a chemist and national prize-winner from the GDR, recalls how a Politburo member viewed the collectivisation of agriculture in the GDR in 1960.

A member of the Politburo with whom I was travelling in the year of the great compulsory collectivization of agriculture in the GDR believed that the difficulties the party was facing with collectivization in the countryside arose from the rural population having rushed into the process too enthusiastically, with the party struggling to restrain them in their headlong haste. This mind-boggling misinformation [was] mutilated beyond recognition. The party then subsequently excused the catastrophic decline in agricultural production in the first years of collectivization by reference to the excessive zeal of the rural population.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

Collectivisation

Look at Source 8. Why might the historian regard this source as particularly valuable evidence about collectivisation?

Opposition to socialist economics

From the early 1950s, there was widespread general dissatisfaction with living standards. Food was heavily rationed, consumer goods were in short supply and there was a serious housing shortage. In addition, taxation was rising, which in many ways was caused by the increasing costs of guarding the GDR's border with the FRG. Discontent within the GDR was clear, with almost half a million of its citizens migrating to the FRG between January 1951 and April 1953 alone. In February 1953, church leaders voiced their concerns about possible social unrest to the government. By early June, the USSR was also alarmed. It ordered the SED to suspend its propaganda about the building of socialism and attempted to persuade the government to relax travel restrictions between the FRG and the GDR.

However, it is vital not to assume that GDR opposition to Ulbricht's policies necessarily meant support for a Western-style capitalist democracy. For example, it was less than a decade since the end of the Second World War, and some of the population would undoubtedly still have held strong feelings about life in Nazi Germany. For those who had risked their lives resisting the Nazis, the socialist dream held out a better prospect for the future than the FGR. The view that West Germany was a haven for Nazis, often used as propaganda by the SED, had an element of truth. Some former Nazi officials found jobs in the government of the FRG, 15 of them as state ministers. Much of the opposition to socialist economics was focused on the harsh working conditions of the workers rather than the aim of building socialism.

The rising of June 1953

In June 1953, Ulbricht announced the need for industrial productivity to increase by ten percent, while workers' wages would remain unchanged. Widespread resentment about this directive by many workers led to the first occasion that Soviet forces were directly used to intervene and suppress dissent in an Eastern bloc state.

In response to the government directive, on 17 June, 300 builders working on a high-profile construction project to develop East Berlin's **Stalinallee** went on strike, demanding the reduction of the ten percent increase in productivity. As the builders marched to the government's House of Ministries, they were joined by thousands of other workers. By the following day, strikes and demonstrations had spread throughout the whole of the GDR, partly due to East Germans listening to the news on West Berlin radio stations.

KEY TERM

Stalinallee
A major street in East Berlin that was being developed with prestigious apartments as a propaganda showpiece and memorial to Stalin. Later, as part of the official de-Stalinisation process carried out in the late 1950s, the street was renamed Karl-Marx Allee.

As well as ridiculing Ulbricht, the protestors' chants also took on an increasingly overt political tone, with demands such as an end to the SED, a genuine choice of political parties at elections, the return of the SPD and the release of political prisoners. Action by the protestors included attacks on prisons, police stations, offices and court houses. The protests also included anti-Soviet messages, and demonstrators climbed onto Berlin's symbolic Brandenburg Gate and set fire to the Soviet flag.

Ulbricht was not sure whether he had the loyalty of the East German police and so appealed to the Soviet Union to intervene directly. More than 20,000 Soviet soldiers and 600 tanks stationed in the GDR moved in to suppress the revolts and impose a state of martial law. During the protests, 21 demonstrators were killed and many were injured.

Although the government acknowledged the role that workers' grievances played in causing the revolt, it also blamed Western radio broadcasts for encouraging the protestors. For a government that was supposed to represent the interests of the workers, the June Uprising was an embarrassment. Bertolt Brecht, the dramatist and poet, commented rather pointedly that if the government did not like the demands of the workers, then perhaps it should elect another set of workers.

EXTEND YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Bertolt Brecht (1898–1956)
An acclaimed dramatist and poet. He had fled Nazi Germany in 1933 and wrote works critical of fascism. After the Second World War, he returned to Germany and settled in the GDR, where the government called on his services to write propaganda for the regime. Although Brecht had sympathies with communism, he was not an uncritical mind, and he grew disillusioned with aspects of SED rule.

SOURCE 9 Soviet tanks enter East Berlin to crush the June 1953 uprising.



SOURCE 10 A statement by the Politburo produced on 21 June 1953, four days after the start of the June Uprising.

> A fascist provocation. The enemy picked Tuesday, June 16 for the start of the provocation. He hurled his gangster columns, armed with guns and oil-filled bottles, across the sector border. Their job was to get the construction workers to lay down their tools and to mislead them with inflammatory slogans into a demonstration against the government. Arson, looting and shooting were to give the demonstration the appearance of an uprising. The enemy instructed its agents to organize similar actions in other parts of the Republic on the following day. The fascists who had sneaked from West Berlin and who were directed from there, organized attacks on food warehouses, school dormitories, clubhouses and shops, as well as attempts on the lives of functionaries. That was how a fascist regime was to be established in the GDR and Germany's road to unity and peace destroyed.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

The June Uprising, 1953

1 Explain what is happening in Source 9.

2 What explanation does Source 10 offer for the June Uprising?

3 How valid to do you find the explanation given by Source 10? Use your own knowledge to explain your answer.

The impact of the uprising

Ironically, the June 1953 uprising allowed Ulbricht to consolidate and strengthen his position. Overall it is estimated that following the uprising around 20 protestors were executed, around 500 received prison sentences and several hundred so-called 'anti-communists' were sent to Siberia. Ulbricht used the uprising to justify a purge of the SED, with estimates that 20,000 SED functionaries

were replaced. The government did, however, respond to the strikers' demands to reduce the work norms. No concessions were made to any of the political demands, though Ulbricht announced in September that economic planning would now give more priority to consumer goods, and food rationing would end the following year.

The rising also reinforced for many the increasing unlikelihood of German reunification. The Western Allies had not intervened and the GDR was soon to be admitted into the **Warsaw Pact**, as well as the USSR sanctioning the GDR's right to rearm and develop its own armed forces. Perhaps the greatest impact of the uprising was that it served, to many East Germans, as a powerful deterrent not to revolt.

Although the June 1953 uprising revealed high levels of dissatisfaction within the GDR towards Soviet-style communism, it did not lead to Ulbricht making significant reforms. Instead, it led him to pursue more hard-line policies. There followed a period of extensive repression, with mass arrests, a purge of the civil service and SED party members, and the reorganisation and re-equipping of the police force. However, there were some concessions, such as an increase in pensions, the production of more consumer goods and reductions in the price of basic items such as milk, butter and coffee.

KEY TERM

Warsaw Pact
This was set up in 1955 and was a military alliance of Eastern European communist states led by the USSR. It was in many ways a response to the USA, Canada and nations in Western Europe having formed NATO in 1949.

THINKING HISTORICALLY Evidence (5a)

Context is everything

Work in groups.

Take an A3 piece of paper. In the middle of it draw a circle about 20 cm in diameter. Within the circle is the evidence itself; outside the circle is the context.



1 Think of a question that Source 10 could be helpful in answering.

2 Inside the circle, write a set of statements giving information that can be gleaned only from the source itself, without any contextual knowledge.

3 Outside the circle, write down statements of contextual knowledge that relate to the source.

4 Draw annotated lines to show links between the contextual statements and the information from the source. Does context change the nature or meaning of the information?

Now answer the following question individually.

5 Explain why knowledge of context is important when gathering and using historical evidence. Give specific examples to illustrate your point.

The impact of socialist economics on the GDR

Cleary the economy of the GDR during the first decade of its existence was focused primarily on heavy industry at the expense of consumer goods. Undoubtedly, East Germans compared themselves unfavourably to West Germans, who enjoyed much higher earnings, shorter working hours and generous holidays. Yet such a comparison is in many ways too simplistic. In East Germany, everybody was guaranteed employment. While some individuals did not have the employment of their choice or matching their skills and abilities, there were no worries about being unemployed. In accordance with communist ideology, the GDR had a much higher proportion of women employed

than in the FRG, and the children of industrial and agricultural workers were given significant educational opportunities. Further in line with Marxist-Leninist ideology, basic foodstuffs, housing and transport were heavily subsidised.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

The economy of the GDR in the period c1949–61

1 In what ways did the economy of the GDR develop in the period c1949–61?

2 What problems were there with the GDR's economy in the period c1949–61?

A Level Exam-style Question Section B

To what extent was the implementation of a socialist economy successful in the years 1949–59? (20 marks)

Tip

This question requires you to examine the successes and failures/limitations of the implementation of a socialist economy during the years 1949–59. You will need to define what is meant by a socialist economy in order to judge whether it was successfully implemented.

WHY DID THE GDR FIND IT NECESSARY TO BUILD THE BERLIN WALL IN 1961?

Emigration in the 1950s and its impact

Despite emigration from the GDR to the FRG being illegal from 1952 onwards and classified as flight from the Republic, 2.5 million East Germans emigrated to the FRG between the formation of the GDR in 1949 and the building of the Berlin Wall 12 years later. This meant that the population of the GDR actually decreased from 18.5 million in 1949 to just over 17 million in 1961. Furthermore, those who emigrated were mostly young, skilled and educated: the very people the GDR was most dependent on for its economic development. To try to prevent the emigration of doctors, for example, the GDR government specifically allowed them certain privileges, such as the right to travel abroad and advantages for their children in obtaining preferential university places.

Although by the mid-1950s the GDR had the highest standard of living in the Eastern bloc, it was continuously confronted by the much more prosperous FRG. East Germans who emigrated to the FRG were automatically entitled to FRG citizenship and received generous financial and housing assistance. The FRG's so-called economic miracle had created a shortage of labour, and so, throughout the 1950s and 1960s, there were plenty of employment opportunities for those who emigrated. Western agents had even been known to enter East Berlin to recruit skilled workers. Many GDR citizens were obviously encouraged by the material advantages of the West, as well as the desire to leave behind what, for some, was a repressive and restrictive existence in the GDR.

The 1,400 km inner-German border between the two German states was closed in 1952. In Operation Vermin, a five kilometre-wide restricted zone was created on the border between the GDR and the FRG, where entire villages were destroyed and watchtowers were constructed, minefields laid and barbed wire fences erected in their place. Special passes were then required for any access into this restricted zone, where only those regarded as loyal GDR citizens could live and others were evicted. Border guards were instructed to shoot anyone who did not stop when asked to do so. Those who failed in their attempt to emigrate were often imprisoned, whereas those who did manage to reach the FRG did so in the knowledge that their families and friends in the GDR would almost inevitably be placed under increased state surveillance and be likely to suffer consequences, such as reduced career and educational opportunities.

Some individuals emigrated by successfully applying for travel visas and then simply not returning. But, for the GDR, it was the annoying enclave of West Berlin in the middle of their state that created the most opportunities for emigration. Since the failure of the USSR's blockade of West Berlin in 1948, the city remained divided, but, as yet, there was no actual physical division between the four Allied sectors. This meant it was quite easy to cross from the Soviet sector to the Western sectors.

EXTEND YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Border-crossers

The situation was also more difficult for the GDR authorities to control because approximately 50,000 so-called 'border-crossers' lived in the GDR, but worked in West Berlin. From the mid-1950s onwards, the GDR increasingly used various measures to discourage individuals from being border-crossers by implementing controls on how they could exchange wages paid in West German currency, and by increasingly labelling them as politically unreliable due to their frequent exposure to capitalist West Berlin.

From the mid-1950s onwards, increasing numbers of both Stasi officers and police officers were employed to identify individuals trying to emigrate, as well as checking mail for those that were posting ahead their treasured possessions. As well as creating a relatively easy way for individuals to escape from the GDR, the existence of West Berlin was a threat as a centre from which Western intelligence operations operated.

Emigration from the GDR threatened to decrease the available workforce by as much as ten percent over the course of the Seven-Year Plan (1959–65). This was clearly unsustainable in economic terms, but it also had political consequences. It allowed the FRG to undermine the GDR's credibility and assert the failings of socialism. The FRG continued to refer to those who had left East Germany as 'refugees' rather than as 'migrants'. Once they arrived in the FRG, in order to receive higher levels of financial and housing assistance from their new state, it was in the former East Germans' best interests to convince the authorities that they had been persecuted.

SOURCE 11 The statistics below show the numbers emigrating from the GDR to the FRG from the establishment of the FRG and GDR in 1949 until the building of the Berlin Wall. Taken from N. Bushnell and A. Leonard, *Germany Divided and Reunited 1945–91* (2009).

Year	Number of emigrants from the GDR to the FRG
1949	125,000
1950	198,000
1951	166,000
1952	182,000
1953	331,000
1954	184,000
1955	253,000
1956	279,000
1957	262,000
1958	204,000
1959	144,000
1960	199,000
1961	155,000 (to the building of the Berlin Wall in August)

SOURCE 12 A speech by Ulbricht at a meeting of Berlin SED members on 21 May 1957. The speech was published in *Neues Deutschland* (the official SED newspaper) on 23 May.

West Berliners know that West Berlin lies within the GDR. The ties of the agents of imperialism and NATO propaganda extend into West Berlin, but NATO's military power will never extend that far. The West Berlin situation has sharpened since West Germany became part of NATO and West Berlin a centre for the operations of NATO agents against the GDR as well as a radar base. Everyone understands that West Berlin's population may some day have to pay very dearly.

EXTRACT 1 A historian, David Childs, writing in 1983, describes life in the GDR during the early 1960s.

> Each stalled summit, each new rumour, each new bellicose speech by a SED leader, each new pin-prick against West Berlin increased the flow, so did job opportunities in the West, and shortages of all kinds in the East. No tomatoes for a Sunday salad, no hinges to fix that faulty cupboard door, no inner tubes for the bike, no cosmetics for self-confidence, no hire purchase furniture, no flat for the married daughter and no likelihood of a family holiday. For many people in Halle, Merseburg or Dessau [cities in the GDR], towns like Hanover, Marburg or Düsseldorf [cities in the FRG] had become romantic places and there were no language problems either. There were other complaints too, even among the great majority who had no land, no firm and no shop to lose, were not very political and were not active church members. They got fed up with the rules and regulations, with having to sign petitions and attend meetings concerning issues about which they were at best indifferent. They were fed up with the 'voluntary' financial contributions to solidarity funds for the Congo, Egypt, Algeria and Vietnam. Rumours about possible closure of the open 'frontier' between East and West Berlin convinced waverers they had better get out while the going was good.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

Emigration from the GDR

1 What factors existed in relation to the following?

a) To encourage emigration from the GDR.

b) To discourage emigration from the GDR.

2 Look at Source 12 and Extract 1.

a) In what ways does Source 12 differ from Extract 1 in its explanations for migration from the GDR?

b) How would you explain these differences?

Reasons for the crisis of 1960–61

A second Berlin Crisis began in 1958. It started in November, when Khrushchev demanded the withdrawal, within six months, of the three Western powers' troops from their sectors in Berlin. Khrushchev argued that this would then allow for Berlin to become a demilitarised free city state (but with its status still guaranteed by the four powers). In reality, the continued existence of such a free city state would always be dependent on the goodwill of the GDR and the USSR. Rather than accept the ultimatum, the USA offered to negotiate, which led to Khrushchev visiting the USA in September 1959. However, President Eisenhower and Khrushchev were unable to resolve any of their differences over West Berlin, with the Western powers continuing to remain in the city with guaranteed legal rights of access. A follow-up meeting was planned to be held in Paris in May 1960.

The planned Paris summit was abruptly cancelled by Khrushchev due to a rapid deterioration in superpower relations following the U-2 crisis in May 1960, when a US spy plane flying in Russian airspace was shot down by a Soviet missile. Worsening international relations increased the sense that the borders between East and West Berlin could soon be closed permanently, and during 1960 alone, nearly 200,000 East Germans left the GDR, usually through Berlin. In the summer of 1961, Khrushchev met the new US President Kennedy and threatened war unless the Berlin question was finally settled. Kennedy responded with a public statement, where he guaranteed the continued status of West Berlin, but he was also careful to make it clear that he had no intention of challenging the USSR's influence in the GDR, including East Berlin.

SOURCE 13 A senior member of the USSR's army, Marshal Vassili Chuikov, speaking about Berlin in June 1961. Recounted in R. M. Slusser, *The Berlin Crisis of 1961* (1973).

> The historic truth is that during the assault on Berlin [in 1945] there was not a single American, British or French armed soldier around it, except for the prisoners of war, whom we freed. Therefore the claims of the United States, British and French ruling circles to some kind of special rights in Berlin are entirely unfounded. They did not take it. They came there to fulfil the conditions of surrender, and on the basis of the fulfilment of these conditions, the occupation of Berlin should long since have ended.

SOURCE 14 Kennedy's public statement on Berlin in June 1961.

> West Berlin has now become as never before the great testing place of Western courage and will. I hear it said that West Berlin is militarily untenable. Any dangerous spot is tenable if brave men will make it so. We do not want to fight but we have fought before. We cannot and will not permit the Communists to drive us out of Berlin, either gradually or by force. For the fulfilment of our pledge to that city is essential to the morale and security of West Germany, to the unity of western Europe, and to the faith of the entire world... We will at all times be ready to talk, if talk will help. But we must be ready to resist with force, if force is used upon us. We seek peace but we shall not surrender.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

The Berlin Crisis, 1960–61

1 What words would you use to describe the tone of Sources 13 and 14?

2 Select words and phrases from each source to illustrate their tone.

3 Use your own knowledge of the context of these sources to explain the tone adopted.

The building of the Berlin Wall and its importance

On 15 June, Ulbricht made a surprise public announcement that 'No one intends to build a wall!' Yet, after a series of intense and secret meetings with the leaders of the Warsaw Pact, and with Khrushchev's support, it was decided that the only solution to solve emigration from the GDR, as well as to alleviate security concerns, was to seal the border between East and West Berlin.

Up to the early 1960s, the USSR had consistently refused suggestions from the SED to completely close the border between East and West Berlin. There were fears that such action would be so provocative that it could lead the West to impose trade restrictions with the GDR or even escalate into outright military confrontation. Further, the USSR argued that the technical difficulties in sealing the border were insurmountable. Instead, the USSR had tried to persuade Ulbricht to pursue more moderate policies, in the hope that this would deter East Germans from emigrating by persuading them of the benefits of life in the GDR.

By 1961, however, the GDR was genuinely facing a crisis. At a meeting of the Eastern bloc states in Moscow on 3–5 August 1961, the decision was taken to close East Berlin's border with West Berlin. The intense secrecy surrounding the preparations meant that not all of Ulbricht's senior ministers were informed. In the early morning of 13 August, what was code-named Operation Rose was efficiently and swiftly carried out. Only East German troops were used and, by six o'clock in the morning the eastern sector of the city was completely blocked off from West Berlin and telephone lines between the two parts of the city were cut. East Germans were told that the measures were for protection from the imperial aims of the West and that the GDR was promoting conditions for international peace.

Initially, partly due to the pressure of time, but also Khrushchev's fear of military confrontation, Khrushchev urged for the sealed border to be constructed gradually. The 'Wall' was made from barbed wire and concrete slabs. When no retaliation from the West followed, a more permanent concrete wall was gradually erected, which was almost complete by the end of the year. Eventually, the Wall ran 45 km along the border of the Soviet sector of Berlin and a similar wall wound around the 160 km of West Berlin and the surrounding territory of the GDR.

SOURCE 15

The building of the Berlin Wall on 13 August 1961 led to an exchange of notes between the governments of the United States and the Soviet Union. The American government had sent a note to the Soviet government on 17 August, condemning the building of the Wall. The following comes from the Soviet reply issued later the same day.

The Soviet government fully understands and supports the actions of the Government of the German Democratic Republic...

West Berlin has been transformed into a centre of subversive activity diversion, and espionage, into a centre of political and economic provocations against the GDR, the Soviet Union, and other socialist countries. Former and present West Berlin municipal leaders have cynically called West Berlin an 'arrow in the living body of the German Democratic Republic', 'a front city', 'a violator of tranquillity,' the 'cheapest atom bomb put in the centre of a socialist state,'...

The Government organs and concerns of the FRG led from West Berlin an entire army of recruiters who, by means of deception, bribery, and blackmail, instigated a certain part of the residents of the GDR to migrate to West Germany...

The GDR has displayed, over the course of many years, great tolerance in the face of such a completely disgraceful and impermissible situation. Implementing its consistently peace-loving and democratic policy, it has borne enormous sacrifices to facilitate the achievement of agreement between the two German states...

Measures taken by the Government of the GDR are temporary.

SOURCE 16

The following is an account by Maxim Leo, whose family lived in East Germany. Here he recounts his mother's experiences as a child in 1961, when the Berlin Wall was erected. His account is based on letters his mother wrote at the time. His mother's family were minor officials in the GDR government.

When the Wall is built in August 1961, Anne is in Geneva on her summer holidays, and isn't really aware of it. Her parents think it is a good thing that there's a proper border now. A protecting rampart to keep bad people out of the country. It's only when she comes home after the holidays that Anne notices what's happened. Her fellow pupils, who aren't allowed to go to the West any more, confront her in the classroom... She feels the hostility of the others, their rage. One of them shouts that the GDR is a prison, a lousy dictatorship in which only Red officials thrive. She stands alone in front of the furious crowd, supposed to defend something that she herself barely understands. She is the fourteen-year-old ambassador for a state that is busy saving its own skin.

In another letter she writes. 'I argue so much with Monika [her school friend] about political matters. ... the Yanks [Americans] are trying to provoke people at the border, and whole units have already crossed the border and then went back. And an East German policeman was run over. We talked about that at school, and I asked Monika what she thought about it. She said she'd seen it on television and the Yanks only marched up to the border and the policeman hadn't been run over. It turned out that she'd been watching Western television...'

A level Exam-Style Question Section A

Study Sources 15 and 16 before you answer this question.

How far could the historian make use of Sources 15 and 16 together to investigate the reasons why the Berlin Wall was built?

Explain your answer using both sources, the information given about them and your own knowledge of the historical context. (20 marks)

Tip

Think about how far the sources agree and disagree about the reasons why the Berlin Wall was built. Use your own knowledge and consider the value of the sources to try to reconcile any differences.

AS Level Exam-Style Question Section B

To what extent was Khrushchev responsible for the decision to build the Berlin Wall in 1961? (20 marks)

Tip

Think about how the actions of Khrushchev played a part in the decision to build the Berlin Wall. Make sure you link his actions to the event. 'How far' requires you to weigh up the responsibility of Khrushchev compared with other factors, such as the role of the pressures from the government of the GDR and the links between them.

SOURCE 17

A woman gazes through a hole in the Berlin Wall, 1961.



The impact of the Berlin Wall

As a solution to the urgent economic crisis facing the GDR, the building of the Berlin Wall worked. The flood of people leaving the GDR was stopped overnight. Ulbricht and the SED government could make plans for the future of the country and, it was hoped, build socialism without being undermined by a depleting workforce. The economy of the GDR now stood a better chance of improving. This led to the introduction of the New Economic System in 1963 (see Chapter 2). Behind the security of the Wall, the economy was able to grow, with more goods being produced, including consumer goods, and the amount of agricultural produce also increased. Thus, the standard of living for people living in

the GDR improved in the 1960s, and the GDR's economy was the strongest of all the **COMECON** countries.

KEY TERM

COMECON
The Council for Mutual Economic Assistance was an economic organisation from 1949 to 1991, led by the USSR. Its members included the GDR from 1950, the countries in the Eastern bloc and other socialist states around the world.

There were other advantages for the government: the Berlin Wall made it easier to control the lives of the people. There was much less contact between East and West. Western influences remained through radio and television broadcasts from the FRG and West Berlin, but contact across the border had been severely curtailed. Now that escape was virtually impossible, the people of the GDR were forced to work to create a separate identity for the GDR state. Many East Germans adopted a sense of resignation to the situation.

The Wall was not always unpopular with certain sectors of the general population. Party members welcomed the chance to build socialism behind the 'anti-fascist protective rampart', as the government had termed the Wall. Workers in East Berlin had complained about West Berliners coming into the east of the city, snapping up subsidised goods at low prices with their higher wages and leaving the shops empty. The Wall stopped that overnight.

Despite the advantages that the Wall offered the government, its impact on the lives of citizens of the city could be devastating. It separated family members, some of whom were living in the West and who could no longer see their relatives in the East. Some children were visiting their family members in the West when the wall went up and could not get back into the country easily. The Wall also put an end to the practice of people living in East Berlin, but working or studying in the West. Thus, the impact on individual lives was often distressing. Family members, separated by the Wall and denied physical contact, gathered at points along the Wall to wave and shout messages to each other. For some, it would be nearly 30 years before they were reunited.

Many East Germans hoped that the West would come to their aid and force the SED government to take the Wall down, but they were disappointed. The realisation that the Wall was there to stay quickly resulted in many attempts to flee across the Wall. Border assailants (***Grenzverletzer***) thought of increasingly adventurous ways to try to cross the Wall. The Wall soon claimed its first victim, on 22 August 1961. Ida Siekmann tried to jump out of the window of her third-floor apartment on Bernauer Strasse, onto the street that lay in the Western sector. She fell on the sidewalk and was severely injured, dying shortly afterwards. She was the first of at least 136 victims.

KEY TERM

Grenzverletzer
Those 'border assailants' who attempted to flee across the Berlin Wall, most of whom failed. The most common methods were to hide on trains that crossed from East to West Berlin, smuggling people in the boots of cars, or digging tunnels under the Wall. The most adventurous attempts involved hot air balloons. Over 5,000 people were caught trying to escape over the Wall: of these, at least 136 were killed at the Wall by the GDR security forces.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

The impact of the Berlin Wall

What impact did the building of the Berlin Wall have on the following?

1 The lives of the population.

2 The economy of the GDR.

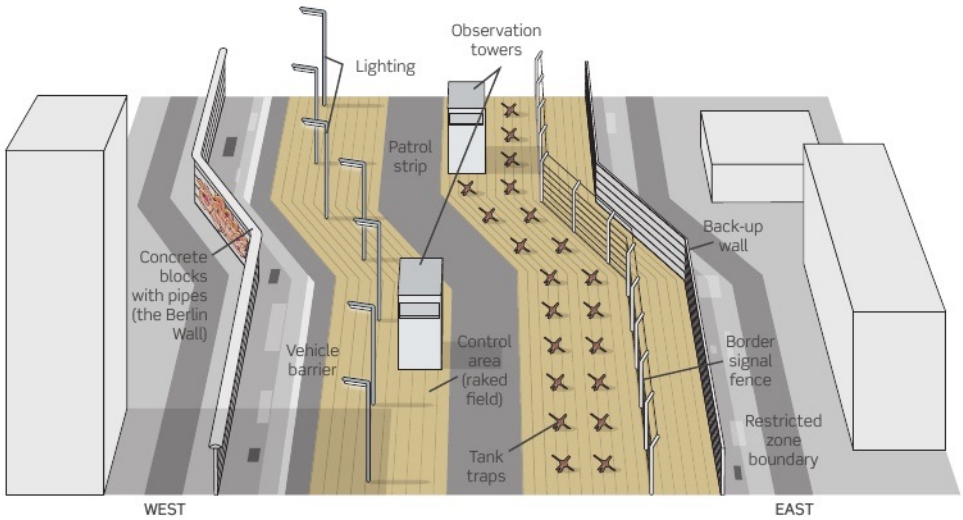


Figure 1.2 The structure of the Berlin Wall.

The influence of Khrushchev

The hold that the USSR continued to exert over the GDR was emphasised by the attitude of Khrushchev to the GDR. Nikita Khrushchev had emerged as Soviet leader after the death of Stalin in 1953. In the USSR, Khrushchev encouraged an element of liberalisation: the apparatus of terror was reduced and greater freedom, albeit within strict limits, was tolerated. These measures, often referred to as 'de-Stalinisation', encouraged governments in the satellite states of Eastern Europe to relax their political control. In the GDR, Ulbricht was to pay only lip service to calls for political relaxation. Ulbricht had admired Stalin, but he failed to establish an effective personal relationship with Khrushchev. Khrushchev's influence on political developments within the GDR were therefore limited. In foreign relations between the superpowers, however, Khrushchev held much more influence. It was he who negotiated directly with the West and his influence was backed up by Soviet military strength.

Khrushchev tried to pursue a more conciliatory approach to the West that involved summits between the leaders of the USA and the USSR. His foreign policy was called **Peaceful Co-existence**, and it envisioned a degree of co-operation. The status of Berlin provided Khrushchev with a useful tool for negotiation with the West and the gaining of concessions. As he was to put it, Berlin was 'the testicles of the West'; when he wanted to put pressure on the West, he gave them a squeeze. Khrushchev's willingness to offer concessions over Berlin was a concern to the government of the GDR, who were often not informed of Khrushchev's intentions. It was a clear indication of Khrushchev's power to determine the future of the GDR.

KEY TERM

Peaceful Co-existence
The policy pursued by the Soviet Union under Khrushchev. It emphasised the need to avoid the dangers of nuclear war by co-operating with the West where there were mutual interests.

The key moves by Khrushchev were:

- The ultimatum of 1958 to the West that called for the removal of all occupying forces from Berlin. Khrushchev wanted Berlin to become a free city, with the existence of East Germany recognised formally by the West. The ultimatum was rejected by the West.
- The ultimatum was renewed in June 1961, when Khrushchev met US President Kennedy at the Vienna Summit. When Kennedy made clear his intention not to relinquish West Berlin, at a meeting of the Eastern bloc states in Moscow on 3–5 August Khrushchev finally gave his approval to the East German government's request to build the Berlin Wall. It was clear that Khrushchev's approval was needed before the GDR could act.

Khrushchev had been using Berlin as a bargaining tool with the West. Yet, once it was clear that this tactic was unlikely to produce results, Khrushchev was willing to agree to the solution proposed by the East German government for shoring up the communist bloc. Once again, the development of the GDR was being determined by international relations.

Conclusion

From its creation in 1949, the GDR had been heavily influenced by the USSR. Its creation was a product of Soviet foreign policy, and its continued existence depended on Soviet economic, political and military support. The change in Soviet leadership that had occurred with the death of Stalin in 1953 did little to alter the basic nature of this relationship. The survival of the GDR, and the status of its capital city, depended on the attitudes and actions of the Soviet Union. It was no wonder that most Western governments viewed the GDR as an artificial creation and a puppet state.

ACTIVITY
SUMMARY

Establishing and consolidating communist rule in the GDR, 1949–61

Explain the ways in which the nature of the GDR was determined by its relationship with the USSR in the years 1949–61, with reference to the following:

1 the creation of the GDR

2 its political system

3 its economic development

4 the building of the Berlin Wall.

WIDER READING

Applebaum, A. *Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe*, Penguin (2012)

Bushnell, N. and Leonard, A. *Germany Divided and Reunited 1945–91*, Hodder Education (2009)

Dale, G. *Popular Protest in East Germany, 1945–1989*, Routledge (2005)

Dennis, M. *The Rise and Fall of the German Democratic Republic, 1945–1990*, Pearson (2000)

Fulbrook, M. *Anatomy of a Dictatorship: Inside the GDR, 1949–89*, OUP (1995)

Fulbrook, M. *Interpretations of The Two Germanies, 1945–1990 (Problems of Interpretation)*, Palgrave Macmillan (2000)

Fulbrook, M. (ed.) *Twentieth-Century Germany: Politics, Culture and Society 1918–1990*, Bloomsbury (2001)

Fulbrook, M., Williamson D., Fellows N. and Wells, M. *Germany: Democracy and Dictatorship, 1919–63*, Heinemann (2008)

Grieder, P. *The German Democratic Republic*, Palgrave Macmillan (2012)

THINKING HISTORICALLY Change (6a)

Separately and together

Below are some different types of history that historians may identify:

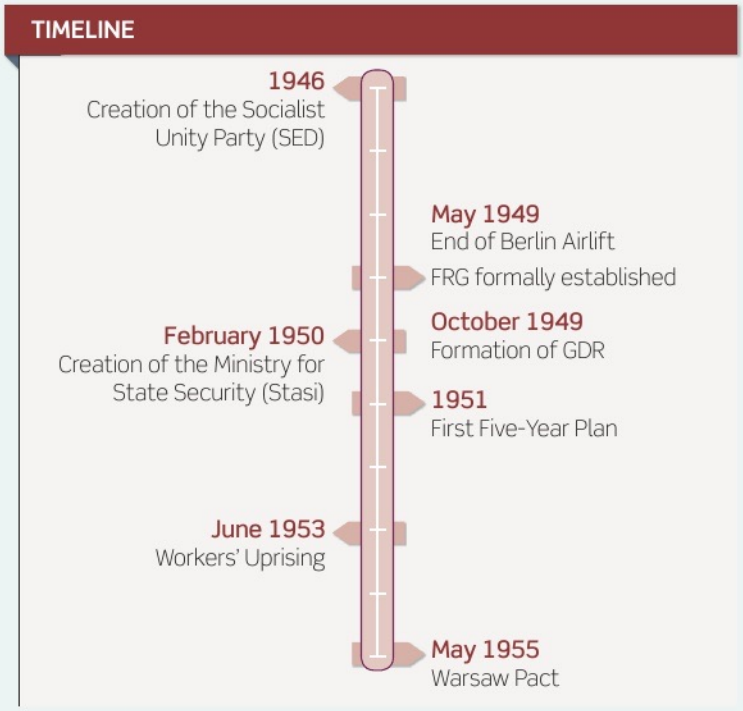
political history	economic history	social history
religious history	military history	international history

These are thematic histories, where the historian focuses on a particular aspect of change. For example, an economic history of the GDR would focus on the organisation of industry and agriculture and its performance in meeting the needs of the population, whereas a political history of the GDR would focus on the methods used by the SED to establish and sustain a one-party state.

Work in groups.

1 Write a definition for each type of history.

Here are some events in our period:



Answer the following:

2 The first and third events can be classified as 'political' events.

a) What role did the USSR play in the formation of the GDR?

b) What other area of history does this take it into?

3 What economic changes came about because of the formation of the GDR?

4 Was the First Five-Year Plan economic or political, or both? Explain your answer.

5 What was the social impact of the creation of the Stasi?

6 Did the June Uprising of 1953 occur for political or military reasons?

Work in pairs.

7 Write a statement attacking 'thematic history'.

8 Write three statements defending 'thematic history'.

9 Explain why 'thematic history' occurs.

2b.2 The development of the East German state, 1961–85

KEY QUESTIONS

- To what extent did the GDR's economy stabilise after 1961?
- How successful was Honecker in developing a distinct identity for the GDR during the years 1971–85?
- How far did relations between the GDR and the FRG improve in the years 1961–85?
- How successful was the GDR in improving its international prestige in the years 1961–85?

INTRODUCTION

The building of the Berlin Wall by the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in 1961 provided the West with an immense propaganda victory. But, with a guaranteed labour supply, the ruling Socialist Unity Party (SED) could confidently proclaim that further advances towards the creation of a communist state could be undertaken. By sealing the border between East and West Berlin, the SED now had more control over economic planning and its population. The GDR's very existence was assured, and the lack of any significant protest by the West implied its reluctance to enter into a conflict. This new-found security therefore gave SED leaders confidence and opportunities. There was an immediate wave of government repression, such as targeting farmers who had so far failed to co-operate with collectivisation, and a campaign against those who listened to Western radio stations or watched Western television. New political offences were introduced, such as referring to the GDR as a prison now that the Wall had been built. A range of new punishments included work camps and restrictions on where people could live.

By the mid-1970s, the GDR had in many ways reached a period of stability. There had been some economic improvements in the availability of consumer goods, developments in scientific and technological industries, and agriculture was now far more productive. In the early 1960s, apart from other communist states, the GDR had been internationally isolated. By the mid-1970s, the GDR was a member of the United Nations and had an impressive record of achievement in international sport. The GDR's economy was also benefiting greatly from the development of a closer relationship with the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), while on a human level there were increasing opportunities for divided families and friends to travel between the two German states.

Yet these developments had both economic and political repercussions for the GDR. For the SED, the GDR's declining isolation meant its citizens had far more exposure to the West. There was, therefore, more potential for the SED's hostile anti-Western propaganda to be undermined and for ideas about reform to spread. From the mid-1970s, it was also increasingly clear that major economic problems were rapidly growing and that the GDR was becoming more financially dependent on the FRG.



1961 – Berlin Wall erected

1962 – Compulsory military service is introduced

1963 – Launch of the New Economic System

West Berliners are allowed to enter East Berlin for the first time since the building of the Berlin Wall

1968 – First Olympic Games with a separate GDR team

1969 – Brandt introduces *Ostpolitik*

1970 – Brandt is the first FRG chancellor to visit the GDR

1961 | 1962 | 1963 | 1968 | 1969 | 1970

TO WHAT EXTENT DID THE GDR'S ECONOMY STABILISE AFTER 1961?

Economic stabilisation after 1961

The construction of the Berlin Wall meant that the GDR's government no longer had to contend with the damaging consequences of a dwindling labour supply. A secure workforce enabled more effective government planning of the economy. There were some clear improvements in living standards from the mid-1960s until the mid-1970s. However, the sealing of the border also created some problems. Before 1961, the dwindling population had helped to alleviate the housing shortage and had created more employment opportunities. It also meant that the SED government could no longer blame emigration for economic problems within the GDR.

These problems could now be addressed, first by Ulbricht's New Economic System (NES, 1963–68) and then, in its modified form, by the Economic System of Socialism (ESS, 1968–71). These attempted to make the economy more efficient by reducing central control and allowing some measures of profit to drive industry forward. Though there was some success in generating growth, both policies lacked Soviet support and were restricted by political manoeuvrings within the SED. In 1971, Ulbricht was removed from power and replaced by Erich Honecker, who immediately reversed the policies and reintroduced central planning.

Honecker's Unity of Social and Economic Policy tried to bring the separate, yet related, spheres of welfare and the economy together. Again, there was some early success in his creation of '**consumer socialism**', but Honecker favoured the social side, which led to underinvestment in industry. The 1970s saw international economic crises, such as the **OPEC** oil price rises, which the GDR was ill-prepared to cope with. East Germany relied too much on the dominant economy of the USSR and, when the Soviets interfered with prices and trade for their own benefit, it was the GDR that paid the increasing costs. By the 1980s, the GDR was suffering from a faltering economy and was more frequently turning away from the COMECON nations and towards the FRG for assistance. However, this in itself would help to germinate the economic problems that would prove fatal in the late 1980s.

KEY TERMS

Consumer socialism
The idea of rewarding workers: if they work for the state, the state would provide them with consumer goods. It was used to describe Honecker's approach to economic policy.

OPEC
The Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries, dominated by Arab states that used the organisation to set the price of crude oil to their advantage.

SOURCE 1

Oliver Fritz writing about the general reaction to the '*die Mauer*' – the Wall. His autobiography, *The Iron Curtain Kid* (2009), recalls a youth spent living in the GDR. Here he is describing the atmosphere in which his parents lived in the years before his birth in 1967.

> The truth is that for the majority of East Germans, who were fairly happy with their life and had no intentions of fleeing, the Berlin Wall came as a relief. Now things could improve in the DDR [GDR]: no more doctors heading off to the west and leaving their patients behind, no more missing workers slowing down the production of much needed goods and no more external acts of sabotage to the economy. The sixties were a time when most DDR citizens still believed that as well as being progressive and socially fairer, their country would one day also become the economically stronger of the two Germanys. Yes, those were the days where everything seemed possible.



ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

The impact of the Berlin Wall

1 What can we learn from Source 1 about the response of the East German population to the Wall?

2 Use your own knowledge of the context of this event to discuss how typical you think this response was of the East German population.

The end of mass emigration

The sealing of the Berlin border by the GDR authorities obviously brought an abrupt end to migration from East to West Germany. Although, during the Wall's existence, there were some successful escapes, several hundred would-be escapees were killed at the border between 1961 and 1989 (at least 136 were killed in the Wall's shadow and over 500 at other GDR border crossings outside Berlin). However, there were few mass demonstrations within East Berlin or the GDR as a whole in the immediate aftermath of the construction of the Wall.

There are a number of factors that explain what, at first, might seem like a surprising absence of large-scale protest within the GDR when Berlin's border was sealed. The secrecy and efficiency of what was code-named Operation Rose meant that the sudden physical division of the city was met with widespread shock and disbelief. There was also an element of fear:

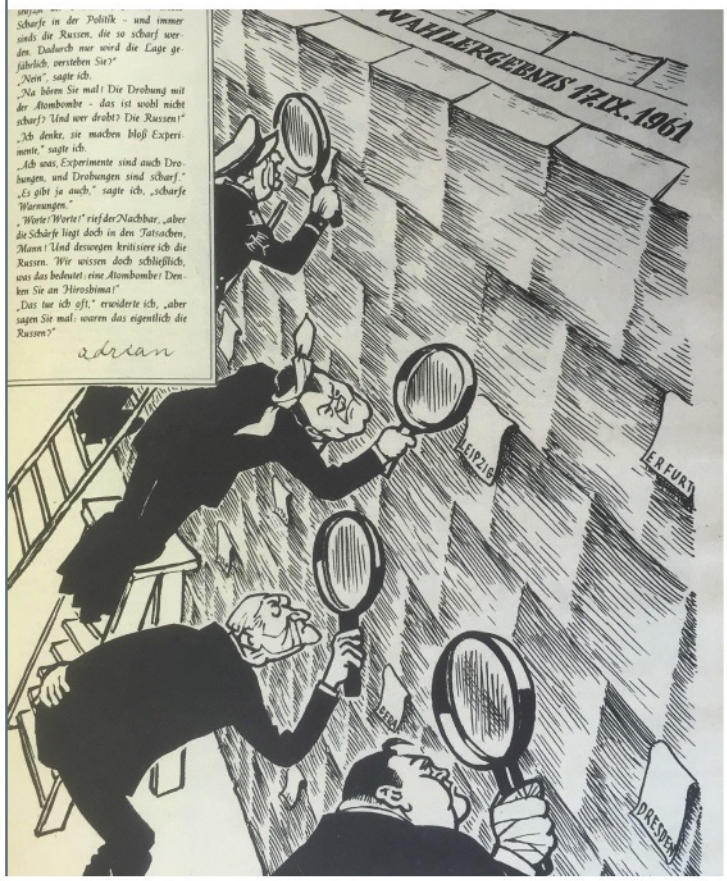
- Many in the GDR had memories of the 1953 uprising and consequently wanted to avoid provoking the authorities into widespread repression – especially now that there was a larger and more extensive Stasi force present.
- The rearmament of both the GDR and the FRG since the mid-1950s had created widespread fear of an international conflict developing into outright war between the two nations.

Some actually supported the construction of the Wall as an essential means to ensure the GDR's survival. Within the GDR there had been some resentment of the border-crossers, who lived in East Berlin, but worked in West Berlin, and could therefore access Western goods, and also towards West Berliners who had previously used East Berlin to buy government-subsidised basic items of food that were less expensive than in the West. There had also been no clear opposition from the West that might encourage the risks incurred by protesting.

The consequence of this restriction of travel to the West, by what the SED repeatedly referred to as the 'protective Wall', was that the division was fixed regardless of Western diplomatic complaints or the hopes of the East German people. The people just had to accept the situation and try to make the best of it. This psychological impact encouraged many to conform, co-operate and even collaborate with the SED to create a better socialist future.

SOURCE 2

A cartoon from the East German satirical magazine *Eulenspiege*, September 1961. The East German government held an election on 17 September 1961, one month after the Wall went up. It was billed as a referendum on government policy, and the government duly received 99 percent of the vote. The cartoon presents the election as an honest and genuine triumph. West German politicians, having already had to accept one wall, now face another, the supposedly unanimous support of East German citizens for their government.



ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

Responses to the building of the Berlin Wall

How valuable is Source 2 as evidence of the response of the government of the GDR to the West's lack of reaction to the building of the Berlin Wall?

For the authorities, the people's adjustment to the new way was reinforced by increasing repression specifically against those deemed more likely to yield to the temptations of Western influences. These ranged from farmers reluctant to collectivise, to people whose aerials picked up Western media. The increase in state control succeeded in suppressing the dangers of large-scale opposition in the aftermath of the construction of the Wall and could therefore be scaled down by the summer of 1962. The SED had solved the issue of emigration and was able to plan its economic strategies more effectively with a guaranteed labour supply. The aim was to show what socialism could achieve.

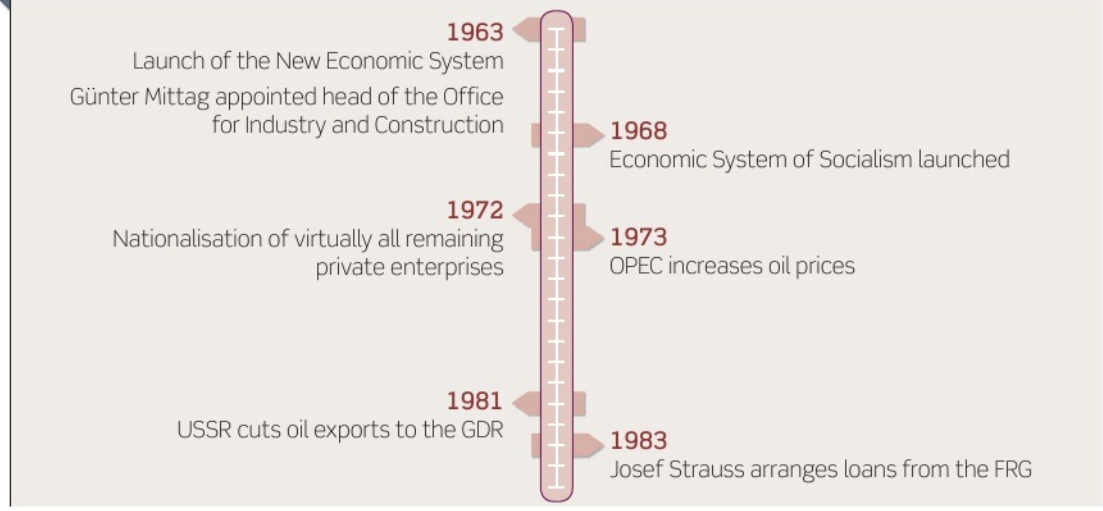
The New Economic System, 1963–68, and the Economic System of Socialism, 1968–71

To improve the GDR's economic performance, Ulbricht launched the New Economic System. This was placed under the direction of Günter Mittag, the Head of the Office for Industry and Construction. There were two main reasons for its implementation in 1963:

- The GDR's new-found security following the construction of the Berlin Wall gave the SED government the opportunity to adopt and, to some extent, experiment with new policies.
- It coincided with the USSR and some Eastern bloc governments, such as in Hungary and Czechoslovakia, recognising the need for economic reforms that could hopefully promote innovation and efficiency.

However, in the case of the GDR, Ulbricht made it very clear that his enthusiastic introduction of economic reforms would not be accompanied by any political reforms.

TIMELINE OF ECONOMIC POLICY



Aims of the New Economic System (NES)

Under the NES, the government retained control of overall economic planning, but more decision-making would be allowed by directors at much lower levels within organisations. It also introduced profit-making as a key indicator of performance, as a means to focus more on the production of quality goods and to create funds for reinvestment. Incentives for workers were introduced, such as financial bonuses and increasing wages for those with higher skill levels. The NES also aimed to focus on scientific and technological developments, especially in the chemical, optics and electronic industries. The SED emphasised the need for scientific expertise, which created opportunities for rewarding careers within the GDR now that it was impossible to emigrate. The NES also encouraged universities and industry to develop links as a means to improve production. However, even success in this aspect caused problems, as the skilled workers found themselves overqualified for the available jobs, which caused dissatisfaction and high labour turnover.

The changes that the NES implemented deviated further from central planning than the ones that Khrushchev has envisaged for the USSR. Although Khrushev did not formally approve the NES, he tolerated it, perhaps as an economic experiment that the USSR could observe and learn from – as long as political concessions did not follow. Despite having a reputation for strict ideological dogma, Ulbricht saw the need to compete with the FRG as paramount. His key supporter in this would be Erich Apel, a former rocket scientist for both the Nazi regime and the Soviets, who had been appointed by Ulbricht as Chairman of the State Planning Commission. As his background suggests, he was less ideologically bound than other leading SED politicians – some of whom, like Honecker, were concerned about the potential loss of SED control and the straining of the bond with the USSR. Nonetheless, in 1963, an optimistic Ulbricht vigorously announced that the first stage of the NES was to commence.

There were various problems with the NES:

- Managers often did not possess the appropriate financial skills and there were frequent difficulties in obtaining the necessary resources.
- There was opposition to the NES by those committed to the ideological aims of creating a communist state. This led to some individuals deliberately sabotaging industrial production, such as breaking machinery or taking extended sick leave from work. Those ideologically committed to the creation of a socialist society felt that the GDR's ideals were being undermined with a lessening of SED control, and that the introduction of financial incentives would lead to the creation of very wealthy individuals.
- There was also the argument that wage differentials were unnecessary when a lack of consumer goods meant there was actually very little to purchase.

Given more time, some of these issues might have been overcome, but the USSR's leadership wanted to recentralise economic planning. This change in attitude by the USSR was partly a result of Brezhnev ousting Khrushchev as leader of the USSR in 1964. His beliefs were far more orthodox and there was clear unease in Moscow that Ulbricht's economic deviation could create a class of ultra-rich elites within the socialist system. Brezhnev's curt visit to the GDR in December 1965 made his feelings quite clear. Failure to meet targets and accusations of relying on West Germany, as well as personal attacks on his character, damaged Apel's political standing and weakened Ulbricht's faith in him. In December 1965, Apel shot himself. His death signalled an end to any chance of continuing the policy of the NES.

The Economic System of Socialism (ESS)

In direct contrast to the celebratory style with which it had been introduced, the NES was quietly modified and centralisation was reintroduced under the Economic System of Socialism. The SED justified this decision on the grounds that the NES had been an experiment and that an economic model based more on communist ideology was now necessary. The ESS, announced in April 1967, was more centrally planned and was extended to include agriculture and trade as well as industry. It restored some price subsidies by the state to promote key industries, and it placed more emphasis on developing computer technology and chemical and plastics industries, with higher production quotas. This was more in line with the international mood coming out of the USSR. The Warsaw Pact's invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, to repress a popular revolt, led to Brezhnev imposing centralisation of the economy throughout the entire Eastern bloc and the return to more hard-line communist policies. The changing political climate limited the effectiveness of an already limited ESS.

However, the desired progression in research and development proved to be difficult to maintain, as the GDR simply did not have the required facilities, experts and financial investment to match those of the West, and in particular the FRG. At first glance, the economic results were encouraging. Between 1968 and 1971, the GDR economy grew by an average of 5.7 percent, while Western estimates of its **gross national product** (GNP) rose from 3.5 percent in the period 1960–65 to 5.1 percent between 1965 and 1970. Industrial production rose considerably across all sectors, including electronics and light industry, and this helped to improve the supply of consumer goods. Industrial production rose 43 percent between 1958 and 1965, while the quality of trained labour improved as the Berlin Wall stemmed the emigration to the West. Progress was also made rebuilding urban areas such as Berlin, Dresden and Leipzig.

These successes, however, disguise the key problem that neither the New Economic System nor its successor, the Economic System of Socialism, lived up to the high expectations placed upon them, and productivity certainly failed to meet Ulbricht's prime aim of overtaking the FRG's economy. Despite domestic growth, there was no real improvement in the GDR's international competitiveness, and even within the GDR the demand often exceeded the supply, especially as the urban renewal used many of the available resources. The NES and the ESS should be seen, not as radical departures from the orthodoxy of a planned economy, but as attempts to make it function more efficiently. Economic authority was firmly in the hands of the Party, and this weakened the ability of the reforms to promote initiative and efficiency at local level. The desire to overtake the FRG placed too much emphasis on a few industries and not enough on consumer products, leading to shortages that made the cold winters at the end of the decade more unpleasant for the citizens of the GDR. It struggled on ineffectively, until the Warsaw Pact's invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 led to Brezhnev imposing

KEY TERM

Gross national product (GNP)
This is an economic measure that values all the products and services of every citizen of a country. The calculation is based on the amount produced, and it is a good indication of whether an economy is growing or shrinking. However, it says nothing about the quality of the goods and it does not distinguish the types of industry, for example, steel production and computer technology.

centralisation of the economy throughout the entire Eastern bloc, and the return to more hard-line communist policies. The changing political climate meant an end to the ESS.

In September 1970, while Ulbricht was on holiday, Honecker saw his opportunity and introduced a Politburo resolution that reversed the narrow emphasis in the economy and dramatically increased central planning, thereby scrapping the ESS. There has been some historical debate over many aspects of the NES/ESS, including conflicting views over the extent to which Ulbricht wished to stray, or even leave, the Marxist economic model. The view that Ulbricht's intention was one of decentralising the economy is possibly an exaggeration, and the policies may have been attempts to slow the descent into economic decline rather than a serious plan to solve the underlying economic problems.

On the other hand, by 1970, the GDR had replaced Poland as the USSR's main trading partner, and the GDR claimed to be in the top ten industrial nations in the world, though at number ten. This was despite the reparations paid to the USSR, as well as Soviet looting of resources in the aftermath of the Second World War. The GDR also proudly noted that this was delivered without resorting to the Marshall Aid money from the USA that the FRG needed for its 'economic miracle'.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

The GDR economy under Ulbricht

1 In what ways did the economy of the GDR develop under Ulbricht?

2 What were the weaknesses of the GDR's economy under Ulbricht?

EXTEND YOUR KNOWLEDGE

The Warsaw Pact's invasion of Czechoslovakia

Alexander Dubček became leader of Czechoslovakia in 1968 and began proposing some relaxations to communist rule, such as less censorship, more freedom of speech, a reduction in the role of the secret police and even the suggestion of allowing more than one political party. These reforms proved too much for the USSR, which eventually sent in tanks to remove Dubček from power and restore a more palatable communist regime.

Increased economic production, including consumer goods

Although the ESS had prioritised investment in the chemical, engineering, electrical and light-engineering industries, the SED recognised the need to improve consumer goods. During the 1960s, there was a significant increase in the availability of household items (such as televisions, refrigerators and washing machines), more so than in the other states within the Eastern bloc. Compared with the FRG, the inferior quality of more basic consumer goods (such as clothing, shoes, chocolate, coffee and fruit) meant that individuals were often dissatisfied. However, the SED was not always blamed for the lack of consumer goods. Many East Germans blamed the USSR for the scale of reparations that had been taken after the Second World War, and others thought it was a result of Germany's division, which was seen as the responsibility of the West.

After 1971, the SED focused on trying to raise the standards of living through consumer socialism and better welfare. The theory was that a more contented workforce would work longer and harder for the state. In short, it meant that if the workforce accepted state control, the state would reward them. The policy was called 'Unity of Social and Economic Policy'. It was hoped that any increases in production would provide the capital needed to improve the social conditions in the GDR, such as health care, education and housing. It necessitated more central control, taken with the full agreement of Brezhnev. However, the economic centralisation, albeit for political reasons, meant that all private and semi-private businesses were nationalised in 1972. This sector had created over 11 percent of GDR production – often small, technical goods – and employed nearly 500,000 people. The loss of these enterprises seriously restricted the impact of Honecker's vision of 'consumer socialism', which led to the policy being reversed in 1976. The focus on the social aspects of the policy would greatly improve welfare and housing standards in the GDR throughout the 1970s, but it meant a consistent underinvestment in industry that would eventually manifest itself in the serious decline of the 1980s. Though the economy did not excel, it had at least stabilised, allowing the state to maintain its control. Industrial production grew steadily at around five percent each year throughout the 1970s, and by 1980 nearly every household had a television and a refrigerator, while 85 percent had washing machines.

Resentment of East Germans at the unavailability of consumer goods was often directed towards the chains of *Delikat* and *Exquisit* shops. These government-run stores sold high-quality and luxurious goods, such as Dresden china. They were designed for the elite Party members and, unlike the *Intershops* (which sold Western goods at lower prices than in West Berlin or the FRG, but only accepted Western currency), they accepted East German currency. The products were unaffordable for the vast majority of GDR citizens.

The overriding problem of the Unity of Social and Economic Policy was that it did not build an economy that was able to cope with the succession of problems that arose from the mid-1970s onwards, and it undermined the regime's ability to maintain its production of consumer goods.

- The OPEC crisis of 1973 suddenly raised worldwide oil prices. This hurt the GDR, as it was a country of few natural resources. The impact was to reduce the GDR's purchasing power for exports.
- By 1982, the GDR was finding it increasingly difficult to secure credit, while a slowdown in retail trade caused a shortage in consumer goods. This escalated into a full-blown liquidity crisis, where rising production costs, increasing state expenditure, mounting interest rates on debts and failing trade all combined to lead to the GDR's inability to borrow money.

The solution was frantic and secret negotiations between the elite leadership of the SED and the FRG to secure nearly two billion

Deutschmarks (DM) in loans in 1983 and 1984. In order to give the illusion to Western nations that the GDR was still a credible investment, this much-needed cash was placed into the banks rather than used as a much-needed impetus for industry. This was combined with attempts to reduce the GDR's reliance on Soviet oil by cutting its own domestic consumption, though the energy cuts also restricted industrial production. Saved fuel was then sold to the West, as were many consumer goods, ranging from eggs to bicycles, to generate hard currency. East Germans noted that a 'thousand little things' vanished from the stores. In 1982, imports fell by 30 percent while exports rose by 9.1 percent. The desperate variety of measures was enough to allow the GDR to function. But it allowed only a breathing space, not a recovery, before the next economic crisis.

The basic inefficiencies of the economic system can be demonstrated with two examples. The absurdities of the bureaucratic obsession with planning can be seen from the order that went out that all factories should use a certain quota of robots – the order was fulfilled by simply reclassifying all lifts and vacuum cleaners as robots. The inferior quality of consumer goods is highlighted by the Trabant or 'Trabi'. These cars were expensive and deliberately underproduced as the state felt private ownership of an automobile was ideologically wrong (as well as encouraging unsupervised travel). A popular joke of the time inferred the poor design and build of the plastic car. 'What's the best feature of a Trabant? There's a heater at the back to keep your hands warm when you're pushing it.'

SOURCE 3 New Trabant cars leaving the factory in 1958. By the early 1980s, around half of all households owned a Trabant. As it could take up to 12 years to obtain a car, it meant that second-hand cars were more expensive than new ones.



ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

Consumer goods

1 What impression does Source 3 give of car production in the GDR in 1958?

2 Using your own knowledge, explain how the Trabant was typical of problems with the production of consumer goods in the GDR.

Membership of COMECON and its importance

In 1950, the GDR became a member of COMECON and, subsequently, 76 percent of its trade was with the USSR and the Eastern bloc. For the next two decades, the GDR's economic planning became intrinsically linked with COMECON, such as the establishment and focus on the Five-Year Plans. As the GDR was unable to keep up with the West's developments in modern technology, it focused its production on the demands of the USSR and its Eastern European allies. The GDR became the most sophisticated industrial economy with the highest living standards in the Eastern bloc. It supplied the USSR and other COMECON members with vital technology in areas such as chemicals, microelectronics and electrical engineering, at well below world market prices.

In the 1970s, a labour shortage meant that the GDR brought in workers from other socialist countries, such as Vietnam, Mozambique, Angola and Cuba. Students from these and other socialist states studied at East German universities, often graduating in science and technology. However, many from outside the European sphere suffered social inequalities and hostility during the economic decline of the 1980s.

The USSR was the GDR's largest trading partner, accounting for 45 percent of GDR exports of plant and machinery. However, this was not very profitable for the GDR, as the products sent to the USSR were never bought at real market price. Also, the USSR paid for these with natural resources. It supplied 90 percent of the GDR's iron ore, oil and wood, and 80 percent of its rolled steel and sheet metal. Therefore, when the USSR changed the prices for these resources, the GDR always suffered.

Links to COMECON were of some value during the OPEC crisis of 1973. The GDR was partly sheltered from the steepest oil price rises by using Soviet supplies. By 1980, after a second OPEC price rise, the Soviets began to reduce GDR oil supplies, despite a personal letter from Honecker to Brezhnev pleading for the oil. The GDR then began to run up its national debt to the USSR.

Membership of COMECON did little to protect the GDR from the financial woes of the late 1970s and 1980s. In fact, by the 1980s, it was the GDR's growing trade with the FRG that was more important in terms of trade, agricultural production and the availability of loans.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

Economic developments in the GDR, 1970–85

1 What factors promoted economic growth in the GDR during this period?

2 What factors hindered economic growth?

3 'The economy of the GDR was unable to match the success of that of the FRG, but was nonetheless successful during this period.' How far do you agree with this statement?

Conclusion

The period 1961–85 can be split into two distinct parts: the Ulbricht-inspired experiment of the NES and ESS, with their slight diffusion of control and experimentation with profit making, and the Honecker-led Unity of Social and Economic Policy, which, after 1971, restored central planning and nationalised private businesses. However, there were similarities between them.

- Both economic phases advocated full political control by the SED. Any economic concessions within the NES would not be mirrored with political concessions. The contract between worker and state of Honecker's 'consumer socialism' may have tried to improve the living standards of the population, but the cost was still repressive control.
- Both were dependent on Soviet agreement and co-operation for success. Ulbricht fell foul of Brezhnev's stricter application of ideology than Khrushchev, whom he replaced in 1964. Honecker worked with the Soviets until the USSR's own economic problems started to impinge on the GDR.
- Despite the best of intentions, both failed to tackle the poor supply and quality of consumer products, unless you had the special privilege to use *Intershops*.

The result was a GDR economy that was in many ways superior to other Eastern bloc countries. The GDR had the unique advantage that it could trade with both the USSR and the FRG, giving it access to Western credit and investment that other socialist states did not have. However, it would seem that the economic systems of East and West were not always compatible, and by 1985, over two decades of economic management by the state had not created a strong enough foundation to support an increasingly technological and international economy.

AS Level Exam-Style Question Section B

How accurate is it to say that the GDR experienced a period of economic stability from 1961 to 1972? (20 marks)

Tip

You will need to weigh up evidence of stability against evidence of instability in the economy. Make sure you make a reasoned judgement supported by precise evidence.

HOW SUCCESSFUL WAS HONECKER IN DEVELOPING A DISTINCT IDENTITY FOR THE GDR DURING THE YEARS 1971–85?

Ulbricht had promoted the view that there was a single German nation divided into two states. He held the belief that these two states would one day be united under socialism. When Ulbricht was forced to resign as leader of the SED in 1971, this view changed. The new leader, Erich Honecker, recognised the reality of the division of Germany that had become entrenched when the Berlin Wall was erected in 1961. Any hope of future reunification seemed remote, and Honecker adopted an approach that he felt would be more likely to preserve the continuation of socialism in a German state, distinct from the bourgeois state in the West. A range of measures was put in force that attempted to develop a separate identity for the GDR, and to instil in its population a sense of pride in its achievements.

Honecker and the development of a GDR identity

By the early 1970s, Ulbricht had lost favour with the Soviet Union and his own colleagues in the Politburo. His stubbornness in continuing to follow policies that were increasingly at odds with Soviet foreign policy was one of many reasons for his fall from favour. In May 1971, Honecker visited Ulbricht at home, accompanied by senior GDR guards armed with machine guns, who surrounded the building. Honecker entered Ulbricht's home and, after more than an hour, gained Ulbricht's agreement to resign.

Honecker had been responsible for implementing the decision to build the Wall in 1961, and he was fully aware of the pressures that had resulted in large numbers of the GDR's population migrating to the West. The Wall was an effective way of stemming the flow of migrants, but it had done little to enhance the reputation of the regime abroad, or indeed at home. A more positive approach was also needed: one that would convince the population of the GDR that they lived in a country of which they could be proud.

Following Honecker's takeover as leader of the GDR, a number of measures were taken to stress the differences between the FRG and the GDR. The aim was to provide a clear demarcation between the two states. This became a deliberate policy to give the GDR a more confident sense of its own unique identity. SED propaganda portrayed the FRG as becoming Americanised, and also claimed that the GDR did not have responsibility for the crimes of the Nazi government. Exports from East Germany were no longer labelled 'Made in Germany', but instead said 'Made in the GDR'. Mass media and sport became two methods of cultivating a sense of national identity in the East German people.

Mass media

The media was strictly controlled by the SED and had a clear role in the campaign towards the building of a communist state. The GDR and the USSR were both promoted, and media coverage of the West would often include comments on the historical inevitability of the downfall of capitalism. The media was put to use to reinforce the evils of capitalism and the superiority of socialism.

Newspapers

The main national newspaper was the SED's *Neues Deutschland*, which had a large circulation, but others were published by the National bloc political parties, and regional newspapers were also permitted. All newspapers were given instructions by the government on what to write. Honecker had daily meetings with the editor of *Neues Deutschland* to approve the front page. There was only one news agency that disseminated information on international events to all newspapers. Newspapers were also funded from government money, so there was no competition for income from circulation or advertising. Before 1961, although it was easy for foreign newspapers to be brought into East Berlin, it was illegal to display or read Western newspapers anywhere in the GDR. After the construction of the Berlin Wall, many Western visitors had newspapers taken from them when entering the GDR. The only Western newspapers allowed to enter the country or to be put on sale there were those published by Western communist parties. There were also strict controls on printing machines and photocopiers, to prevent the distribution of any publications that were subversive to the SED. These measures were largely, if not completely, successful.

All newspapers had the same underlying messages. SED leaders were adulated, while widespread social problems in the FRG (such as homelessness, unemployment and drug addiction) and anniversaries (such as the USSR liberating Germany from Nazism, the establishment of the GDR and the formation of the SED) were promoted.

The Party directly controlled 70 percent of all publications in the GDR; most of the rest were papers and magazines produced by the mass organisations, such as the Free German Youth (FDJ) and trade unions, and tended to either be non-political or follow the Party line. The only publications that were not controlled by the SED were those from Church organisations, but these were expected to write solely on religious matters and be strictly non-controversial.

Radio

Radios had been widespread in Germany since the 1920s, and a range of stations existed at the time of the creation of the GDR in 1949. By the 1970s, there were several radio stations broadcasting in the GDR: Radio DDR 1 was established in August 1953, and Radio DDR 2 followed in 1958. In addition, the station *Berliner Rundfunk* catered for the capital. In 1964, a youth music station, DT 64, was added. These stations broadcast a mix of music and spoken word, sports reporting being particularly popular. By 1985, there were 6.6 million licensed radios in the country, or 39.9 for every 100 people. Yet, what the population was listening to on their radios was a matter of concern to the regime. Western radio stations were broadcast across most of the GDR and were often more popular than GDR output. The demand for Western music was high among the young, and this tended to weaken the hold that the GDR stations had on this group of the population. The government attempted to jam foreign signals, but this was outlawed by international agreement and risked the West jamming East German radio stations in retaliation.

Television

By the 1970s, televisions were widely available in East German homes, and the state took particular care to ensure that the population of the GDR received access to information that glorified socialism. This was a particular concern because most homes in the GDR could pick up Western stations broadcast from West Berlin. Television was controlled by *Fernsehen der DDR* (DDR-FS), and the state-run company had two stations by 1969. Colour programming also began in this year. Care was taken to ensure news programmes were not broadcast at the same time as those on FRG stations, as most people would have preferred to watch West German news. Popular entertainment was scheduled at the same time as West German news broadcasts, to discourage viewers switching their aerials to the West.

The output of the GDR television stations was heavily political and often not very subtle. Karl Eduard Von Schnitzler was the regime's leading propagandist. His weekly programme *Der Schwarze Kanal* (*The Black Channel*) bombarded viewers with uncompromisingly hostile views of the West; the FRG was referred to as 'the Land of Wolves', and the West German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer as 'Hitler's Heir'. Many East Germans claimed not to watch it, but most did, aghast at the content and its delivery. Von Schnitzler was one of the most despised men in the GDR. By the mid-1970s, Honecker recognised that a more subtle approach was likely to be more effective, but Von Schnitzler, while often out of favour (he had been dismissed from his role as a political director of GDR television in 1958), always resurfaced in another role as a television discussion host.

It would be unfair to see East German television output as little more than turgid propaganda. Many of its programmes were popular. The East German version of the children's programme *The Sand Man* was adored by generations of East Germans, and was a cultural icon of the GDR that was to last longer than the country that produced it. East Germans may have been very sceptical of the claims of their own television news broadcasts, but this did not mean that they believed the news transmitted by West German channels.

Impact

The SED regime saw language as a key element in developing ***Abgrenzung* (demarcation)** from West Germany, and the media was instrumental in this process. By the 1970s, the impact of the

KEY TERM

Abgrenzung (demarcation)
The policy of developing clear differences between the GDR and the FRG, actively pursued by Honecker.

media, alongside education, had produced distinct differences in the use of language. East Germans did their shopping in a *Kaufhalle* (buying hall), never in a *Supermarkt* (the term used in the FRG). The word 'secretary' was not used in the East to describe administrators, except Party officials. The GDR preferred to give many office workers the title 'skilled worker for writing technology'. The capital city of the GDR was never referred to as East Berlin, because it drew attention to the fact that the city was divided. Road signs simply declared 'Berlin, capital of the GDR'. The term 'West Berlin' was run together as Westberlin to give the impression it was another city altogether.

There was a tendency to Sovietise the language used in East Germany, with terms such as *Kollectiv* (collective) and *brigade* (group of workers) commonly used. This trend was enhanced by the use of Russian as the foreign language studied in schools. These trends led to the emergence of different and distinct cultural developments in East Germany.

Most people would purchase a copy of *Neues Deutschland* to give an outward appearance of conformity. They would watch GDR television programmes and listen to GDR radio broadcasts, but, uniquely among other Eastern bloc states, this was supplemented by access to television and radio programmes produced in the West. This significantly undermined the SED's propaganda about current affairs, as well as making East Germans fully aware of the much higher living standards and personal freedom in the FRG. Viewing and listening to West German programmes was officially illegal, but it was impossible to control as it was so widespread. In 1974, the SED finally admitted to fighting a losing battle. Western stations were to be discouraged, but tolerated.

SOURCE 4 From O. Fritz, *The Iron Curtain Kid* (2009). Oliver Fritz lived in the GDR from his birth in 1967 until reunification in 1990.

Every year in the DDR [GDR], there were two big demonstrations – the first on May Day, the international Fighting and Celebration Day of the Working People, and the second on 7 October, the National Holiday, to celebrate the inauguration of the DDR in 1949.

On both days the party and state leadership occupied two hastily erected stands in the heart of East Berlin, in the early years at Marx-Engels Platz (a huge square) and later at the Karl-Marx-Allee, our capital's most prestigious boulevard...

The televised events on 1 May and 7 October always followed the same pattern: Berliners would walk past the stands, accompanied by music and chanted slogans from loudspeakers ('A hip, hip, hooray to our party and leadership!') The media in return would label these processions as 'powerful illustrations of the bond between the people and the party and state leadership'. These demonstrations took place virtually in every town and village up and down the country, though the military parade was exclusive to the capital...

Yet what all demonstrations had in common was that most participants aimed for one thing: saving most of the day by finishing the march as quickly as possible.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

Mass participation

Look at Source 4. How valuable is this source as evidence of support for the GDR government?

The importance of sport, especially Olympic successes and women's sports

The SED actively promoted the value of sport for several reasons. As well as improving the population's well-being, the benefits of sport on individuals' health was regarded as a means to boost productivity in the workplace. It could also perform a key role in developing pride in the state.

Sport as a mass participation activity

As sporting organisations were controlled by the SED and were not overtly political, they became an effective method of bringing large numbers of the population under the influence of the regime. By 1982, 3.3 million East Germans belonged to a sports club. Football, fishing and gymnastics were the most popular. These sporting clubs were part of the German Gymnastics and Sports Association (DTSB), an umbrella organisation directed by the SED. In 1980, there were over 28,000 sporting festivals in the GDR, ranging from the children's *Spartakaiden* to those where factory teams, villages and clubs competed against each other. These festivals attracted a high participation rate, as did walking, rambling and chess. Surveys conducted by the DTSB in the mid-1980s are revealing about participants' attitudes to these activities. When asked why they participated in sports, only 14 percent gave the officially appropriate answer; 80 percent responded 'because it was fun'. Poor investment in sports facilities, especially swimming pools that were often closed for repairs, sometimes dampened enthusiasm. Nonetheless, sport did provide a valuable tool for bringing a large part of the population under the influence of the regime.

SOURCE 5 Regina Gläsel, born in 1952, reminisces in 2014 about sport in the GDR. She lived in Reinsdorf, a small village near Wittenberg in the GDR. She was an active member of the local handball club from the age of ten. She played in the second-highest league in the GDR and won medals as a member of the GDR's youth team.

Sport in the GDR was very, very important and we had the motto 'Everyone in every place'. At school sports lessons were two hours long and three times a week, as well as extra-curricular sports which were run by volunteers. A huge emphasis was put on competitions which were conducted in all sports at school, district, state and country level. At the sports centres the best were trained and supported and there was a continuous scouting for those that were talented. This meant that it was always possible to have sufficient top athletes in all sports for European and World Championships right up to the Olympics. Everyone could participate regardless of cost as all sport provision was financed by the state and was not influenced by profit. For adults sports days were held at work.

As a result a spirit of unity and self-confidence was strengthened and present.

AS Level Exam-Style Question Section A

Study Source 5 before you answer this question.

Why is Source 5 valuable to the historian for an enquiry about the role of sport in the GDR?

Explain your answer using the source, the information given about it and your own knowledge of the historical context. (8 marks)

Tip

Think about the inferences you can make about the role of sport from this evidence. Does your own knowledge suggest that Regina's experiences and attitudes were typical?

International sport

From the early 1960s onwards, international sport became increasingly important as a means to develop a sense of national pride and to show the supposed superiority of socialism over capitalism, as well as a means to help reduce the GDR's diplomatic isolation. In the 1964 Tokyo Olympic Games, the FRG and GDR were represented as one all-German team. But, from the 1968 Mexico Olympic Games onwards, as a symbol of the growing divergence and sense of permanent separation, the GDR and the FRG entered separate teams. In the 1968 Olympic Games, the GDR's team was referred to as 'East Germany' whereas the team representing the FRG was referred to as 'Germany'. By the 1972 Munich Olympics, full recognition of the GDR had occurred as its own flag and national anthem were used.

The GDR's performance was frequently spectacular. In the 1968 Olympic Games, for example, the GDR gained 25 medals and came in sixth place, with the USA and the USSR leading the table. By the Montreal games of 1976, East Germany was second in the medal table to the USSR (see Source 6). At the Moscow Olympics in 1980, East Germany won 11 of the 13 gold medals available in women's swimming – six of these with new world records.

SOURCE 6 Medal table from the Olympic Games, 1976.

Ranking	Country	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Total
1	USSR	49	41	35	125
2	GDR	40	25	25	90
3	USA	34	35	25	94
4	FRG	10	12	17	39

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

International sport and the GDR

Look at Sources 6 and 7. How far do these sources provide evidence that the international prestige of the GDR was raised during the 1970s?

SOURCE 7 Marita Koch (right), competing for East Germany in the 400 metres at the Athletes World Cup, 1977. East Germany won the women's team event, beating the USSR and the USA, despite its much smaller population. West Germany did not qualify.



There were some notable individuals who excelled in their sport and impressed both at home and abroad:

- Marita Koch, the athlete who set world records at 100, 200 and 400 metres. She set the world record for the women's 400 metres during the World Cup team event in 1985, running the distance in 47.60 seconds. It is unlikely to be beaten.
- Rica Reinisch, the swimmer who won three gold medals, all with new world record times, at the Moscow Olympics. She was a product of the Dresden Sports School.
- Katarina Witt, the figure skater who won Olympic gold medals in 1984 and 1988, as well as being World Champion four times during the 1980s.

The GDR's impressive performance in international sport was due to the extreme emphasis that the SED placed on identifying talented children at a young age and focusing on those sports that were seen as the most likely to result in a large number of medals. Prospective sportsmen and women were sent to elite special schools, and talented players were allocated to work as coaches in around 30 specially designated sports clubs. The schools enforced strict discipline as well as intensive political indoctrination. By the mid-1970s, there were approximately 10,000 places in the specialist sports schools, and there was also a highly

regarded institution in Leipzig dedicated to the training of sports instructors, which clearly contributed to the GDR's performance in international sports events.

The GDR's sporting success was also due to the German Gymnastics and Sports Association (DTSB). This had been formed in 1957 and helped to produce world-class athletes. It worked with the Ministry of Education, the FDJ and the SED to produce plans and reports to assist with the planning of sports provision that were submitted directly to the Politburo for the government's approval.

The Stasi also had a role in sport. The SED sent spies to the FRG to obtain information on its sports training programmes, and an extensive network of informers monitored the political reliability of sportsmen and women. When GDR teams participated in international events, they were accompanied by Stasi officers. At such events, the GDR's players were not permitted to liaise with those from Western states.

Much of the success was based on that of women's sports. This was partly explained by the **amateur status** required for Olympic sports before 1988. This rule worked to the disadvantage of female athletes in the West, who had to continue to work and often fulfil family commitments. East German female athletes were able to devote all of their time to a punishing training programme supported by the state. Progress in women's sports was also aided by a systematic and comprehensive programme involving illegal performance-enhancing drugs. This was organised by the SED, who administered the substances often without full explanations, and, at times, without the knowledge of the individuals being trained. Some of the drugs affected the athletes' hormonal balance, and this provided an advantage to women that could not be replicated to the same degree with men. The impact of these drugs could be devastating. Heidi Krieger won gold in the shot put at the European Championships in 1986, after eight years training at the Dynamo Sports Club in East Berlin. Fed with regular doses of anabolic steroids and birth control pills, her physique was altered. Since 1997, she has lived as a man.

KEY TERM

Amateur status
The Olympic ideal is that sportsmen and sportswomen should be of amateur status, that they would compete for honour and glory, not for prize money. Those professionals who made a living from earning prize money in competitions were barred from the Olympic Games until 1988. Amateurs usually had to support themselves by working in full- or part-time employment.

From the late 1970s, international recognition of East German success was often dampened by accusations that performance-enhancing drugs were involved. Many of these suspicions were confirmed after the reunification of Germany, when records were released.

Sporting successes provided a focus for national pride, but the effectiveness of this was hampered by popular resentment at the privileges and pampering given to athletes by the government. Their ability to travel abroad was particularly resented.

Conclusion

Honecker's attempts to build a sense of a separate and distinct identity for the East German state had produced mixed results by 1985. The SED struggled to impose a sense of national pride in the GDR. The mass media was undermined by continuing Western influences, and sporting success was often celebrated with an air of cynicism. In the field of football, a passion shared by East and West Germans, the GDR's achievements were extremely limited. West Germany won the World Cup in 1954 and 1974. East Germany only made the final stages once, in 1974. Many East Germans were happy to celebrate sporting victories by all Germans, whether from the East or the West, and this was hardly evidence of the distinct national identity Honecker had hoped for. Nonetheless, the GDR did produce heroes of whom its population were genuinely proud. In 1978, Sigmund Jähn became the first German in space, when he flew on the Soyuz 29 mission with Soviet cosmonauts. He was awarded the Hero of the GDR medal, for once an award that most East Germans felt was deserved.

By the early 1980s, most citizens of the GDR considered themselves to be Germans, but there was a growing acceptance, albeit rather grudgingly, that they were different from their West German counterparts. These feelings produced tensions and mixed responses within the minds of most individuals (see Source 8).

SOURCE 8

Reiner Oschmann was a journalist for *Neues Deutschland*, and as such he was able to travel frequently to the West. The British journalist, Anne McElvoy, asked him in 1989 whether he had ever been tempted not to go back to the GDR when abroad. This is his reply:

> Oh yes. It was a guilty secret in my heart, and my wife's, though we told no one, we often thought about it. Every time we came back to East Germany it felt stranger to us. Landing at Schonefeld airport, you couldn't mistake that you were back: the dirt, the incompetence, the awful clash of those metal doors while they looked at your documents...
>
> It was always a Western mistake to assume that East Germans only stayed because they were locked in behind the Wall. Staying here certainly didn't mean that one was in agreement with what was going on. It was a question of solidarity with one's people. Loyalty not to the state but to those left behind, to one's country, however awful one knew some of its aspects to be. This loyalty sounds sentimental, but perhaps more understandable to British people than others – to our West German neighbours, for instance.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

GDR identity

1 Why might an East German in 1980 feel different, in terms of their national identity, to a West German?

2 Do you think these differences would be superficial? Explain your answer.

3 How successful were attempts by the government to develop a distinct identity for the GDR?

KEY TERMS

Hallstein Doctrine
This was named after Walter Hallstein, West Germany's foreign secretary from 1951 to 1958, and publicly announced by Adenauer in 1955. It committed the FRG to the reunification of Germany and stated that only the FRG represented the entire German nation. It did not accept the GDR as a legitimate state and would not permit diplomatic relations with any nation, apart from the USSR, that accepted the GDR's existence. The Doctrine referred to the GDR as 'a zone'.

Détente
A term used to refer to a period of foreign policy started by the USA in the mid-1960s. It aimed to improve superpower relations by easing tensions between the USA and the USSR. It led to various attempts to limit the spread of nuclear weapons and increasing international diplomacy. It came to an end following the USSR's invasion of Afghanistan in 1979.

USEFUL ABBREVIATIONS

CDU
The Christian Democratic Party, the leading political party of West Germany from 1945. It was a centre-right party.

SPD
The Social Democratic Party, the leading left-of-centre political party of West Germany.

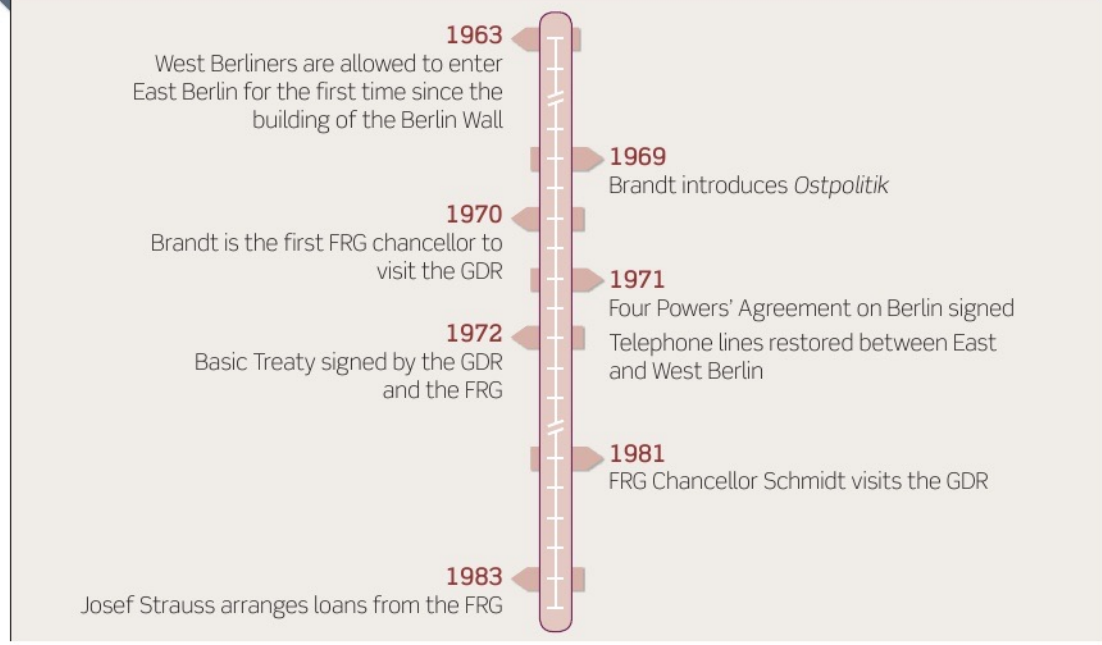
HOW FAR DID RELATIONS BETWEEN THE GDR AND THE FRG IMPROVE IN THE YEARS 1961–85?

The FRG's government was continuously led by Christian Democratic Union Party (CDU) chancellors from its foundation in 1949 until 1969. The CDU strongly supported the **Hallstein Doctrine**, which helped to sustain the division of Germany. Many, in both West Germany and the wider international community, had criticised Adenauer as chancellor for not visiting West Berlin until ten days after the building of the Berlin Wall. It was not until Willy Brandt was elected as the FRG's first Social Democratic Party (SPD) chancellor in 1969 that any attempt was made to try to improve relations between the two German states.

The late 1960s also saw an easing of relations between the USA and the USSR through their pursuit of what was known as **détente**. From 1969 onwards, extremely controversial changes took place in relations between the GDR and the FRG. Supporters of détente regarded the 1970s and 1980s as a period of important developments, such as increasing the personal contact allowed for divided friends and families. Critics attacked détente for supporting a communist state that abused its own people.

The building of the Berlin Wall had a profound effect on the city's mayor at the time, Willy Brandt. He made it clear that he wanted to improve relations with the GDR and had been able to successfully negotiate the right for West Berliners to visit East Berlin during Christmas 1963. He became the FRG's first Social Democratic Party chancellor in 1969 and was therefore in a position to implement policies at a national level. Brandt believed that the FRG had focused exclusively on developing relations with Western Europe and the USA at the expense of improving relations with the GDR and other countries in the Eastern bloc. Almost immediately in his chancellorship there were significant changes in relations between the two German states.

TIMELINE OF RELATIONS WITH THE FRG



Ostpolitik ('East Politics')

Brandt's pursuit of a policy that became known as *Ostpolitik* began in 1969, and was continued in various forms by successive FRG chancellors right up until the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989. It aimed to improve relations between the FRG and the GDR, as well as with other Eastern bloc states and the USSR. Brandt believed that the Hallstein Doctrine had failed to have any negative effect on the GDR and that closer links, especially trade, stood more chance of undermining the GDR in the long run (see Source 9). It was designed to offer a more flexible response to the GDR,

while also maintaining the close links that the FRG had with the West, such as NATO. It was therefore a policy that was encouraged by the USA as well, as it echoed its détente policy with the USSR. *Ostpolitik* took a pragmatic view of the international situation in the late 1960s. The FRG had refused to recognise the GDR as a nation for 20 years, but it was still there. Brandt saw the need to accept the situation and work with it in order for the FRG to have an influence upon it.

SOURCE 9 From a speech given by Willy Brandt to the West German Parliament, October 1969. Brandt had become chancellor of the FRG in September.

> Twenty years after the establishment of the Federal Republic of Germany and of the GDR we must prevent any further alienation of the two parts of the German nation, that is, arrive at a regular modus vivendi [way of living together] and from there proceed to cooperation.
>
> This is not just a German interest, it is of importance also for peace in Europe and for East-West relations... The Federal Government... again offers the Council of Ministers of the GDR negotiations at governmental level without discrimination on either side, which should lead to contractually agreed cooperation. International recognition of the GDR by the Federal Republic is out of the question. Even if there exists two states in Germany, they are not foreign countries to each other: their relations with each other can only be of a special nature.
>
> ... We are not deluding ourselves to believe that reconciliation will be easy or quick to achieve. It is a process, but it is time now to push ahead that process...

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

Brandt and *Ostpolitik*

1 Explain the context within which Brandt issued the statement shown in Source 9. What is the importance of the fact that this is part of a speech to the West German Parliament?

2 What did he wish to achieve, and why?

ACTIVITY
WRITING

Words as precision tools

1 Identify any words or phrases in Source 9 that you do not understand and research their meanings.

2 Identify words and phrases that show the writer's feelings towards the relationship with the GDR. Write a short paragraph explaining their views, using quotes from the source to back up your points.

For Brandt, the improving relationship or rapprochement with the GDR would also be applied to the whole of the Eastern bloc, but the clearest demonstration of his intentions specifically to the GDR can be seen in his meeting with Willi Stoph (leader of the Council of Ministers) in Erfurt in March 1970. This was the first visit to the GDR by a leading FRG politician, and Brandt was enthusiastically greeted by the East German crowds. To the annoyance of the GDR government, many in the crowd carried banners with a 'Y' on them to show their support for Willy (Brandt) rather than Willi (Stoph).

In human terms, *Ostpolitik* was clearly successful, as agreements were reached that led to West Germans being able to visit the GDR and, therefore, there was much more contact between divided families and friends. The number of visits by West Germans to the GDR rose from 1.25 million in 1971 to over six million in 1973, while the number of telephone calls between the two nations increased six-fold between 1971 and 1976. The policy was popular with the populations of both the GDR and the FRG, and Brandt's pursuit of its aims was a clear factor in his winning a second term as chancellor. The GDR also benefited from ending its diplomatic isolation and gained desperately needed financial support for its increasingly failing economy. But, if part of Brandt's intention was to encourage the SED to adopt more liberal policies, then in this respect *Ostpolitik* was a failure, and, instead, contributed to the more repressive policies of Honecker's government from the mid-1970s onwards.

For the SED, *Ostpolitik* presented a dilemma. On the one hand, it brought significant economic and diplomatic advantages for the GDR. There was more diplomatic recognition of East Germany from other Western states, and the economic benefits of increasing trade with the FRG were substantial. However, the SED also feared that closer contacts with the FRG could significantly destabilise the GDR. The state's ideological basis would be increasingly challenged, the SED's propaganda messages would be discredited, and the disparity in living standards between the two German states would be even more apparent. Therefore, the SED used its policy of *Abgrenzung* (demarcation) to emphasise the differences between the GDR and the FRG, and measures such as the GDR-Soviet Friendship Treaty in 1975 increased East Germany's solidarity with the USSR.

The national anthem had contained a reference to the 'united Fatherland'. This line was dropped, though no new lines were created, meaning it would be played but no longer sung. Amendments were made to the constitution to counter the changing political circumstances with the growing links between the GDR and the FRG brought about by *Ostpolitik*. These changes were brought in with much pomp and ceremony, but in practice they made very little difference and would have been hardly noticed by the vast majority of East German citizens. The reference to the GDR as a socialist state of the German nation was reworded to be a socialist state of workers and peasants. This apparent rejection of their German nationhood confused many East German citizens, especially as they had been told for 20 years that they were indeed part of Germany and that the GDR would one day unite the whole of Germany under a socialist flag. Sensing this unease, *Abgrenzung* slowed down in the late 1970s.

What these amendments did reflect, however, was the increasing divergence and separate paths of the GDR and the FRG in the eyes of the SED. Article 6 of the 1974 constitution stated that the GDR 'is forever and irrevocably allied with the USSR'. Many in both East and West Germany increasingly accepted the likelihood that Germany's post-war division would become permanent.

Therefore, there is an argument that *Ostpolitik* helped to maintain the formal division by accepting the situation and prompting the GDR state to highlight and emphasise the differences between the two. On the other hand, Brandt saw the policy as a long-term strategy to keep the FRG as a rival interest to the USSR in the GDR. It was a policy continued throughout, and despite the Cold War tensions of the 1980s. The GDR received over DM15 billion in loans from the FRG. Therefore, the GDR had to lean towards the West during the economic crisis of the late 1980s. In conclusion, *Ostpolitik* helped to keep the GDR German in nature, despite the SED's attempts to remove that part of its identity.

EXTEND YOUR KNOWLEDGE

The Guillaume Affair

In 1973, it was discovered that one of Brandt's senior aides, Günther Guillaume, was a GDR spy who was directly supervised by Markus Wolf, head of the Stasi. The affair was a major reason for Brandt's resignation in 1974. Guillame was sentenced to 13 years in prison, but was released by the FRG in 1981 in exchange for Western spies who had been caught by the GDR.

Guillaume returned to the GDR as a national hero and began training spies. It is thought that Honecker wanted to topple Brandt in an attempt to end the FRG's pursuit of *Ostpolitik*. After the end of the Cold War, Markus Wolf wrote to Brandt expressing his regret that, under his command, actions by the Stasi had significantly contributed to Brandt having to resign.

The agreements of 1970–72

Ostpolitik marked a general improvement in relations and it manifested itself in a number of agreements between the FRG and the GDR, the USSR and the Eastern bloc states. Any inter-German relationship had to take place within the wider context of the triangular diplomacy of the FRG–GDR–USSR, hence the first treaties are about creating the boundaries, diplomatic and physical, within which the relationship could grow.

- 1970 Treaty of Moscow: the FRG and the USSR agreed to no territorial claims against each other.
- 1970 Treaty of Warsaw: the FRG accepted the border between the GDR and Poland.
- 1971 Four Powers' Agreement: this allowed West Berliners to visit East Berlin and secured Soviet acceptance of this provision. In effect, it made another situation such as the Berlin Blockade impossible and significantly reduced the potential threat of conflict over Berlin.
- 1972 Basic Treaty: this key accord saw the FRG and the GDR both acknowledge the existence of each other as states and agree to settle disputes without threatening or using force.

The Basic Treaty formed the basis of relations between the two states, and, therefore, it would go on to initiate the GDR's acceptance by the wider world. Nations with formal relations with the GDR increased from 38 in 1972 to 123 by 1978, including the USA in 1974. Technically, if quietly, the FRG still officially remained committed to reunification, and there were still issues over the status of Berlin, for example. Also, there were no FRG ambassadors in the GDR, just 'representatives'.

One difference between the outlook of the two nations can be seen in their official view of each other. East Germany treated the FRG as a foreign country, and therefore relations with West Germany were dealt with by the foreign ministry of the GDR. West Germany viewed the GDR

differently, and its relations with the GDR were handled by the ministry of intra-German affairs, not its foreign ministry.

Nonetheless, despite these separate approaches, the Basic Treaty had great significance beyond formal recognition. It placed relations on a firm and solid base, and thereby allowed the relationship to develop, as both nations could interact without the overwhelming and crippling fear of losing their identity. This development can be seen in the boost to travel between the FRG and GDR throughout the 1970s.

The relaxation of travel restrictions and the growth of communications with the FRG

A key priority for FRG politicians was to reduce the human cost caused by the Berlin Wall. The first development came in Christmas 1963, when special arrangements were made to allow West Berliners to obtain 24-hour passes to visit relatives and friends in East Berlin. Over a million West Berliners took advantage of this, although applying for the entry visa often entailed a very long wait. Despite the GDR authorities rejecting some applications, it was clearly a step towards improving personal contacts. From 1964 onwards, the GDR allowed old-age pensioners to visit West Berlin and the FRG – although this was simply because the SED was not concerned if they did not return, as pensioners were not considered economically productive and were often reliant on state pensions. Unfortunately for the SED, the vast majority did return. At the same time, West Berliners could visit the GDR for up to 30 days a year. Often, the crossing point was Friedrichstrasse rail station, where so many emotional meetings and partings took place it was known locally as 'the palace of tears'. In 1971, communication became easier, if no less traumatic, when telephone lines between East and West Berlin were resumed. By 1988, over 40 million calls a years were being exchanged. Honecker also agreed that those GDR citizens guilty of flight from the republic by fleeing to the FRG could make visits to the GDR without the risk of being prosecuted.

For West Germans, there were a number of routes into the GDR, consisting of four motorways (maintained at FRG expense of DM500 million per year) and four train routes, as well as canals and rivers. Westerners were often checked carefully at security points, with West German newspapers being removed and mirrors placed under vehicles to check for people being smuggled out. The SED hoped that the links between family and friends would fade over time and that demand for travel would decrease. This was not the case, as many in East Germany wanted closer contact with the West, as well as access to Western currency.

However, the SED made it difficult for East Germans to visit the West. Apart from business and sports competitors, it was exceptionally hard to get a permit. When a personal visit was allowed, usually because of a family emergency, only one member of a family was permitted to travel. This was an obvious way to guarantee their return. It was just one method of emotional blackmail, as if an individual failed to return to the GDR, their family would be subjected to Stasi interrogations and restrictions on their careers within the GDR.

Fearful of increasing Western influence, and in line with the *Abgrenzung* policy, the amount of currency that Westerners needed to exchange into GDR currency to gain an entry visa was doubled in November 1973. Consequently, this led to the numbers visiting East Berlin falling by one-third in 1974. A further increase in the compulsory amount of money that had to be exchanged into GDR currency followed in 1983, as a response by the GDR government to the FRG allowing NATO to deploy nuclear weapons within its territory. This was even extended to children and pensioners.

Travel and communication between the two Germanys was clearly going to increase and was seen as part of the process of *Ostpolitik*. The problem for the SED was to try to impose a sense of control over the arrangements. This was always going to be challenging when dealing with the factor of foreign individuals over whom no direct control is possible. At best, the SED could only hope to put them off. It was easier to deal with its own citizens. Before 1983, over 100,000 East Germans had applied for emigration to the FRG and been refused, often resulting in Stasi interference, discrimination and imprisonment. Even when the GDR began to allow restricted emigration in 1984, a significant number of the 40,000 people permitted to leave were individuals the SED believed to be potential opponents to the regime. In other words, it was another avenue of political control, rather than an acknowledgement of the freedom to travel that so many of its own citizens wanted.

The impact of *Ostpolitik* on the GDR's economy and standard of living

Commentators at the time, and historians since, have argued about the impact of *Ostpolitik* on the GDR. On one hand, it led to financial support for the GDR. This financial support – in the manner of subsidies, ransom payments for freeing prisoners, tax benefits and credit favours – was desperately needed. It also allowed for some improvement in the lives of East Germans, as it led to Honecker's increasing confidence to introduce widespread welfare reforms. However, in many ways, the benefits of *Ostpolitik* to the GDR were short term, as it led to reckless borrowing and the GDR's increasing financial dependence on the FRG.

Advantages of *Ostpolitik* for the GDR

Honecker's Unity of Economic and Social Policy aimed to raise living standards through consumerism and welfare. As well as an ideological justification for these measures, they were also made possible by the availability of cheap credit from the FRG due to *Ostpolitik*. During the 1970s and 1980s, living standards in the GDR improved compared with the other states in the Eastern bloc, and consumer goods such as cars and household goods became much more widely available. Nonetheless, items that became increasingly common in the FRG during the 1980s (such as video recorders and microwaves) were often rare in the GDR. The GDR also overcame the shortage of certain goods as a result of trade agreements with the FRG: there were no tariffs or trade barriers, which in effect made the GDR an unofficial member of the **European Economic Community (EEC)**.

KEY TERM

European Economic Community (EEC)
This was set up in 1957 to develop economic unity between states in Western Europe. The FRG was one of the original six member countries. The EEC was officially renamed the European Union in 1993.

Disadvantages of *Ostpolitik* for the GDR

Honecker's government can be seen as indulging in reckless borrowing. On average, more than DM800 million of income each year was generated from the introduction of compulsory currency exchanges for those entering East Berlin from West Berlin, as well as from FRG funds that were lent to the GDR. This equates to about eight percent of all East German foreign trade. The rate of increase is shown by the level of trade increasing from DM8.8 billion in 1978 to almost double that in 1986, DM15.2 billion. Reflecting the long-term plan of Brandt, *Ostpolitik* was pulling the GDR towards the West. This gave the GDR the short-term economic medicine to stabilise its financial illness, but it generated political problems that were harder for the SED to cure.

Some loans from the FRG were explicitly tied to specific arrangements, such as two credits in the early 1980s for granting 35,000 GDR citizens emigration to the FRG. Other loans allowed the FRG to justify putting pressure on the GDR to remove landmines from the inner-German border, withdraw automatic shooting guns and implement measures to aid communication between the two states (with, for example, better postal services and telephone networks). This all chipped away at SED control over its own affairs.

Even the two secret loans of nearly DM2 billion to solve the 1982 liquidity crisis were used to prop up the GDR's financial reputation, by allowing it to honour other loans rather than being used to modernise the economic infrastructure. This crisis management furthered the GDR's dependence on the FRG. The USSR raised its concerns, but interest-free credit from the GDR's main trading partner in the West was too good to refuse. The continued lack of investment in the areas that needed it most simply added to the economic crisis of the GDR.

Conclusion

Though relations between the two German states did have periods of tension, the consistent trend, from the low point of the construction of the Berlin Wall to the mid-1980s, was one of improving and closer relations politically, culturally and, especially, economically. This was a direct result of the FRG's policy of *Ostpolitik*, and therefore gave a distinct advantage to the FRG in its dealings with the GDR. Whoever the leader of West Germany was – Brandt, or his successors, Helmut Schmidt and Helmut Kohl – the policy of *Ostpolitik* remained. To the SED, it was a mixed blessing. It enabled the economy to function, but it threatened to erode the very identity of the GDR over time. Social policies and small restrictions were introduced to limit the influence of the Western system, but these did little to hold back the tide. Disputes that did arise were usually over the exposure of GDR citizens to the higher standards of living in the West. It was all very good having a better life than your Eastern bloc comrades, but the grass was always greener on the other side of the **Iron Curtain**.

KEY TERM

Iron Curtain
The dividing line between the Eastern bloc countries (that were under communist rule) and Western Europe.

These disputes were also more often a reflection of the wider context of the increase in Cold War tensions at the start of the 1980s. As the USSR and the USA became increasingly polarised and belligerent towards each other, the secondary nations had to echo this feeling. The GDR was still dependent on the USSR as the dominant Eastern superpower, so restrictions on travel were implemented. However, these were restrictions rather than outright bans. The GDR always hoped that the policy would facilitate its economic progression and modernisation, while the FRG never shifted from the basic principles of *Ostpolitik*. For the GDR, any economic gains would be nullified by its failure to control the social consequences and economic reliance on the FRG that *Ostpolitik* entailed. This eventually helped to tear the East German people, though not the leadership, from its allegiance to the USSR.

EXTEND YOUR KNOWLEDGE

The role of *Ostpolitik* and the removal of Ulbricht

Traditionally, *Ostpolitik* has been seen as the primary cause in the downfall of Ulbricht as leader of the SED in 1971. It was his opposition to the policy, as well as the wider trend of détente, that caused his dismissal and subsequent replacement by Honecker. However, this view has been challenged since the fall of the GDR.

Evidence indicates that Ulbricht was open to the FRG's economic aid, while Honecker was less accepting than previously suspected. It seems that the vital difference between the two leaders was a willingness to be led by Brezhnev and the USSR. The aftermath of the crushing of the Prague Spring in 1968 made it clear to all that the USSR was the centre of power in the region, and Brezhnev saw Ulbricht as too independent.

THINKING HISTORICALLY Cause and consequence (6b)

Attitudes and actions

Individuals can only make choices based on their context. Prevalent attitudes combine with individual experience and natural temperament to frame the individual's perception of what is going on around them. Nobody can know the future or see into the minds of others.

Context	Action
• West German governments did not want to give the GDR any credibility. • The Berlin Wall had caused outrage and anger against the GDR in West Germany. • In the late 1960s, détente had developed between the USA and the USSR, encouraging co-operation across the Iron Curtain. • Willy Brandt was mayor of West Berlin when the Berlin Wall was built. • Brandt became leader of the left-wing SPD Party in 1964. • Brandt became the first SPD leader to be elected chancellor of the FRG in 1969.	• On becoming chancellor of the FRG, Brandt pursued a policy of *Ostpolitik*. He was able to improve travel arrangements between East and West Germany, allowing many people to visit relatives for the first time since the Berlin Wall was erected. Brandt hoped that the GDR government would adopt more liberal policies if he started negotiations with its leaders. The GDR gained many advantages from *Ostpolitik*, reducing the diplomatic isolation it had suffered after 1961 and gaining financial help from the FRG, but it did not adopt more liberal policies.

Answer the following questions individually and discuss your answers in a group.

1 Why might Brandt have believed that most Germans, both in the East and West, would support *Ostpolitik*?

2 Why might Brandt have believed that the GDR would become more liberal if the FRG started to negotiate?

3 What other information would have been useful to him to help him decide on his course of action?

4 How reasonable was Brandt's course of action, given what he understood about the situation at the time?

5 How far should the historian try to understand the context of the beliefs and values of people in the past when explaining why individuals make choices in history?

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

The debate surrounding the GDR and Ostpolitik

1 In what ways did the GDR benefit from *Ostpolitik*?

2 In what ways did *Ostpolitik* undermine the GDR?

3 To what extent do you agree with the view that *Ostpolitik* brought more benefits than disadvantages to the GDR?

HOW SUCCESSFUL WAS THE GDR IN IMPROVING ITS INTERNATIONAL PRESTIGE IN THE YEARS 1961–85?

During the 1970s, the GDR achieved full international recognition by joining the United Nations. The two Germanys recognised each other in the 1972 Basic Treaty, and the GDR had gained formal diplomatic recognition from 123 countries by 1978. The treaties agreed between the FRG, GDR and the USSR led to far greater international recognition of the GDR and allowed both German states to be admitted as members of the United Nations in 1973. It helped the SED leadership legitimise its rule, even if its self-perception of the GDR's worth could be questioned. An East German saying of the time asks, 'Which three great nations in the world begin with "U"?' The answer is: 'USA, USSR and Our GDR (*Unsere DDR*).' This pertains to the fact that the SED not only referred to itself as 'our GDR', but also exaggerated its world status.

International recognition of the GDR

Although the Berlin Wall gave SED leaders a sense of reasonable security, there was also a desire in the SED to end the GDR's international isolation. In 1961, the GDR only had diplomatic relations with the other Eastern bloc states and some developing countries, such as North Korea and North Vietnam. The FRG's Hallstein Doctrine severely restricted international recognition of the GDR, and made it even more dependent on its relations with the USSR and the other Eastern bloc states. This influence would ensure that many countries did not formally recognise the GDR for the first two decades of its existence.

Both German states wanted to build themselves a reputation based on international relations and global standing. The West Germans wanted the international community to see them as the only lawful representative of the German nation. To gain acceptance of the GDR as a legitimate state, East Germany was keen to have diplomatic relations that were not aligned to the Warsaw Pact or NATO. Threats by the FRG to withhold aid if Third World countries recognised the GDR became complicated in the Middle East during the Arab-Israeli conflict in the 1960s. When West Germany recognised the state of Israel, it opened the door for East Germany to develop relations with some of the opposing Arab states. Subsequently, in 1969, a number of Arab states recognised the GDR.

A change in attitude by the FRG about how to deal with the GDR, demonstrated by the *Ostpolitik* policy, opened the door for a thaw in international relations. Therefore, the Basic Treaty of 1972 between the two Germanys meant that the GDR was formally recognised by the FRG. The two states pledged to respect one another's sovereignty. This paved the way for East Germany to join the United Nations as its 133rd member in September 1973, as the Western powers in the UN Security Council agreed not to veto the GDR's membership. The impact of membership was immediate. The GDR would now be involved in other international agreements. Honecker, seated between Chancellor Schmidt and US President Gerald Ford, signed the **Helsinki Accords** in 1975. While both Honecker and Brezhnev totally ignored the human rights aspects of the accords, involvement boosted the GDR's international standing. Honecker concluded that the conference showed that the GDR was the socialist heart of Europe. It is ironic that the reporting of the full text of the Helsinki Accords in the SED newspaper *Neues Deutschland* resulted in it selling out for the first time in its publication. This illustrates the dual nature of being on the international stage. What occurs at the international level, for good or bad, has an impact on domestic affairs that often cannot be anticipated.

Though the prestige of the GDR joining the international club undoubtedly helped the SED justify the independence of East Germany as a separate entity to West Germany, it also forced the GDR

KEY TERM

Helsinki Accords (1975)
This was a series of accords agreed to by 35 European states, as well as the USSR and the USA. The agreements were split into three 'Baskets'. Basket One saw all European borders as 'inviolable' (they could not be altered by force). Basket Two focused on trade and technology links. Basket Three emphasised human rights and freedom of movement. At the time, it was seen as the ongoing success of détente, but, in fact, it was its peak and it had a rather superficial impact.

The Accords are sometimes referred to as the Helsinki Final Act.

to interact with other nations. The trouble for a nation at the heart of Europe was that it was connected to all of them, making diplomacy a careful balancing act. It meant contact with Western states while trying to limit any cultural and political penetration. It meant maintaining relations with an increasingly tense Eastern bloc. Finally, it meant being subservient to the USSR while trying to increase its own sovereignty.

State visits

The first official state visit by Ulbricht was to Egypt in 1965. It marked the end of the GDR's political isolation. Agreements were announced regarding economic and technical co-operation, scientific-technical relations, culture and trade. It was also agreed that an Egyptian delegation would visit the GDR in the future. This helped to provide international recognition of the GDR.

The period of détente allowed greater diplomatic relations between the two Germanys. In March 1970, Brandt made the first visit by an FRG chancellor to the GDR (see Extracts 1–3). This first visit had much more symbolic value than any decisions actually being made. The visit was reciprocated by Willi Stoph, the prime minister of the GDR, to Kassel in the FRG in May that year. The GDR government was not pleased that the enthusiastic welcome of East Germans towards Brandt was not repeated by the West Germans towards Stoph.

In December 1981, there was also a visit by FRG Chancellor Schmidt to the GDR, but on this occasion, the East German crowds were carefully chosen and controlled by the SED and the Stasi, to ensure the crowd were loyal citizens. However, the visit was successful in that it showed that, in the international climate of Cold War tension, the two Germanys were still intent on maintaining a relationship based more on *Ostpolitik* than mistrust. Honecker was invited to the FRG on this occasion. However, the Soviet leadership imposed enough pressure for this to be postponed until 1987.

It was the official state visits to countries that were neither COMECON nor socialist that really gave both the GDR and Honecker, as its leader, international prestige and recognition as a permanent country. In 1980, Honecker visited his first Western state, Austria, and then his first NATO country, Italy, in 1985. Honecker also visited Belgium, Spain, Sweden and France, while the leaders of Greece, Austria and Denmark visited the GDR. However, there were limits to the impact these visits had on the international status of the GDR. Despite his wishes, Honecker never received an invitation to visit the UK or the USA. Indeed, the American-manned crossing point at Checkpoint Charlie in Berlin was in service for nearly 30 years, but it remained as a small wooden building, little more than a shed. It was a subtle statement that such a simple construction was all that was needed for a temporary state of affairs. In 1983, the new West German chancellor, Helmut Kohl, repeated the invitation for Honecker to visit, but the Soviet authorities in the USSR made it clear that the visit was not to go ahead.

The increase in state visits reflected the growing international recognition of the GDR that emerged after the 1972 Basic Treaty. However, by their very nature, the visits also helped to open up the GDR to outside influences. The contact may help to portray the image of the GDR as independent, but it also encouraged the East German public to have a more positive attitude to foreign states, who were no longer viewed as the absolute enemy they once were. When Honecker finally visited West Germany in 1987, the Stasi reported that young people saw the visit as proof of the obsolescence of the Berlin Wall and the redundancy of anti-FRG propaganda.

EXTRACT 1 An analysis of the meeting between Willy Brandt and Willi Stoph by historians N. Bushnell and A. Leonard in *Germany Divided and Reunited 1945–91* (2009).

In March 1970 Willy Brandt met Willi Stoph (leader of the GDR's Council of Ministers) in Erfurt in the GDR. This was the first ever meeting between senior government figures of the FRG and GDR and demonstrated that measures to develop better mutual relations were being taken very seriously by both Germanys. The attitude of the East German public was evident in the enthusiastic public welcome which Brandt received. Brandt was greeted with large crowds of excited East German citizens lining the streets with banners displaying a big 'Y' to show it was Willy Brandt rather than Willi Stoph that they were cheering for.

EXTRACT 2 An analysis of the meeting between Brandt and Stoph by historian John Lewis Gaddis in *The Cold War* (2005).

> ... the Soviet Union and its Warsaw Pact allies were on the path to decline, and *Détente* was concealing their difficulties. One hint of this came as early as March 1970, when in the spirit of *Ostpolitik* the East German authorities invited West German Chancellor Brandt to visit Erfurt, unwisely giving him a hotel room with a window overlooking a public square. To their intense embarrassment, hundreds of East Germans gathered under it to cheer their visitor.

EXTRACT 3 An analysis of the meetings between Brandt and Stoph by historian M. Dennis in *The Rise and Fall of the German Democratic Republic* (2000).

> After much delay, two momentous meetings were held between the two heads of government, Brandt and Stoph, in Erfurt on 19 March and in Kassel on 21 May 1970. Although no diplomatic breakthrough occurred, the main point was that the meetings actually took place

THINKING HISTORICALLY Evidence (6a)

Arguments and facts

Work in groups.

1 Why are facts important in history?

2 Read Extracts 1 and 2.

a) How do these extracts disagree?

b) Which extract do think is correct? Explain your answer.

3 Read Extracts 2 and 3.

a) How do these extracts disagree?

b) What do you think is the significance of Brandt's meeting with Stoph in 1970? Do you think that these authors, whose accounts differ in terms of the facts, would have viewed the significance of the meeting differently? Explain your answer.

4 All of these extracts focus on the significance of the meeting, but only brief details of the actual event. Which do you think is more important?

5 If we accept that one of these extracts is wrong about the details of the visit, do we discount it as being useful? Explain your answer.

Relations with COMECON and the Warsaw Pact countries

The legacy of the Second World War meant that relations between the GDR and some Eastern bloc countries, such as Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia, were strained. Some East Germans resented the loss of land in the east to Poland at the end of the Second World War. There were, for example, strict controls when a labour shortage in the GDR led to Poles working in the GDR. Also, exchange controls had to be set up between Poland and Germany, as German resentment grew when Poles crossed into the GDR to buy goods that were unavailable in Poland, creating shortages in East Germany. A similar measure had to be introduced in Czechoslovakia to prevent Germans buying goods there, such as electrical items and clothes. The governments of the Warsaw Pact countries were therefore concerned that nationalist sentiments would override socialist solidarity.

Some Warsaw Pact countries resented the apparent arrogance of the East German leadership in the 1960s, such as Władysław Gomulka of Poland, and they feared the potential links that the GDR might have or develop with the FRG. To bolster the GDR's standing, Ulbricht signed bilateral treaties of friendships in 1967 with Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Bulgaria. The first test was the **Prague Spring** of 1968 and the Warsaw Pact's crushing of the uprising.

KEY TERM

Prague Spring
The brief period of liberal reforms carried out by the Czechoslovakian communist government under Alexander Dubček in 1968. It came to an end when the USSR invaded the country to restore a communist government that was more to its liking.

Ulbricht was a fierce supporter of the invasion of Czechoslovakia and took part in the planning. However, the GDR's army, the NVA established in 1956, did not take part, perhaps because the memories of the 1938 Nazi invasion of the country would create further unrest. Like all Warsaw Pact countries, the GDR clearly understood the message that no liberalisation would be tolerated and that the **Brezhnev Doctrine** applied to all.

Following Ulbricht's replacement by Honecker in 1971, relations within COMECON and the Warsaw Pact decreased in importance, as the GDR leaned economically towards the West during the *Ostpolitik* era. Through the 1970s and early 1980s, the GDR's standard of living was higher than that of the other Eastern bloc countries and, as Honecker and the SED worked to create a GDR identity both internally and internationally, the relationship was not high on the agenda. However, when it threatened the interests of the GDR, action was taken.

With travel to the West less restricted from Poland and Hungary, movement from the GDR to these states had to be monitored. When the demands for political reform grew in Poland during the early 1980s, the GDR imposed the requirement of visas for travel between the two counties. By November, rail links were stopped and then the border was closed. Plans for a Warsaw Pact military intervention were drawn up, and although these were abandoned after the Polish authorities clamped down on the reformers, it showed that the Brezhnev Doctrine was still strong. It also highlighted that the GDR was very much part of the Warsaw Pact, but the driving force was clearly the USSR. Rather than their relationships with each other, it was each individual Eastern bloc's relationship with Moscow that carried the most weight. Or, to be more precise, it was Moscow's relationship with each of them that was dominant.

KEY TERM

Brezhnev Doctrine
This was announced in September 1968 to justify the Warsaw Pact's invasion of Czechoslovakia, and it said that when 'hostile' forces try to implement aspects of capitalism within a socialist country, it immediately becomes a common problem of all socialist countries. It was used to enforce USSR control and influence over the Eastern bloc.

The attitude of the Soviet government towards the GDR

Particularly since the aftermath of the Czechoslovakian invasion, the USSR had become increasingly concerned with the attitude of Ulbricht and the GDR's position relative to the USSR. In 1970, Brezhnev had reminded the SED leadership that the presence of the USSR should always be in the plans and thoughts of the GDR, especially as it had troops barracked there. While Ulbricht had desired genuine co-operation between the two nations as equals, this was unacceptable to the Soviet leadership. Ulbricht damaged relations with the USSR by describing the GDR as a socialist model to be emulated by others, which by implication challenged the superiority of the USSR. Therefore, in August 1970, Brezhnev met the SED leadership without Ulbricht being present and his rule was ended. In January 1971, 13 of the 21 members of the Politburo signed a letter from Brezhnev calling for Ulbricht's resignation. Honecker was more willing to conform to the wishes of the USSR.

For most of the 1970s, the close relationship between Honecker and Brezhnev was the most significant form of Soviet influence. Ulbricht's notions that the GDR had equal status in the friendship with the USSR were replaced by Honecker's view that the role of the GDR was one of permanent subservience. Honecker had the vital support of the USSR, and Brezhnev deliberately pursued an agenda in which Honecker could increase his own power base within the GDR, while the USSR held effective control over the GDR's foreign policy. The USSR was the dominant partner, with overall control of all of its satellite states through the Warsaw Pact.

As Honecker played the triangular diplomacy with the FRG and USSR, through *Ostpolitik*, the Soviet Union also continued to negotiate matters concerning the GDR directly with the USA, Britain and France. The 1971 Four Powers' Agreement (the 'Berlin accord') guaranteed the movement of people, traffic and trade from West Germany and West Berlin. In the relationship between the USSR and the GDR, the USSR was the dominant partner. The 1975 Treaty of Friendship and Mutual Assistance tied the links between them. Socialism would grow from Moscow, with the USSR always further along the path to communism. The USSR was the role model to aspire too.

As détente moved to Cold War hostility in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the USSR put pressure on Honecker to tighten up on aspects of *Ostpolitik*, especially in relation to travel restrictions from West Germany. The FRG had given permission for NATO to place mid-range nuclear missiles on its soil, and the USSR responded by placing its own within the GDR. It was the USSR that co-ordinated the military manoeuvres that forced the Polish government to repress popular protests in 1980. When Honecker was invited by Chancellor Schmidt and then Kohl to visit the FRG in 1981 and 1984, it was the USSR who initially advised Honecker to delay, and then bluntly told him he was not going. This was a reminder of two important constants in the life of the GDR. First, the USSR was the senior state, and second, it was the USSR's military might that underpinned the SED's regime.

A Level Exam-Style Question Section B

To what extent was Honecker successful in his attempts to improve the international prestige of the GDR? (20 marks)

Tip

This question requires you to assess the degree of success achieved by Honecker rather than merely describe the actions he took to improve the international prestige of the GDR.

The key to this attitude was the Brezhnev Doctrine. This attitude survived and was even hardened by Brezhnev's short-lived successors, Yuri Andropov and Konstantin Chernenko, but the long-term decline in the Russian economy began to put a real strain on its foreign policy. It was their replacement in 1985, Mikhail Gorbachev, who began to dismantle the Doctrine and therefore relinquish Soviet dominance in the affairs of the GDR. However, far from allowing the SED full independence as the rulers of a socialist state, it would remove the very pillar of support that the SED needed to maintain control.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

The GDR's relations with other powers in the period 1961–85

In what ways during the 1970s did the GDR's relations change with the following?

1 The USSR and the Eastern bloc

2 The FRG and the West.

The GDR, particularly under the leadership of Honecker, had enjoyed a decade of growing international recognition, shown through its membership of the United Nations in 1973 and its prominent place at the 1975 Helsinki Accords. This prestige was clearest in the series of state visits that followed, not only within COMECON and Warsaw Pact countries, but in Western states as well. However, as these visits tended to pull the GDR towards the West, it was the GDR's role within the Warsaw Pact that kept it in the East, especially when it concerned political matters. The final and most dominant factor was the attitude of the USSR, and the GDR only moved as far as the USSR allowed it to move. In 1984, the GDR may well have felt it was an independent socialist state whose borders and sovereignty were recognised by most of the world. However, the GDR was still heavily reliant on its economic ties with the FRG and its political ties to the USSR.

Conclusion

The East German state had developed considerably since the crisis and construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961. The Wall had actually helped to provide a sense of security for the GDR, which then allowed the economy to start to evolve. Ulbricht's modifications in the GDR's economy had met with disapproval from the USSR and were duly dropped (along with Ulbricht himself), in favour of Honecker's more central planning in line with the Soviet model. This managed to stabilise the economy during the 1970s, as Honecker pushed for a 'consumer socialism' that would provide the appropriate living standards for a socialist state. Along with this went the promotion of a national identity, whether through the mass media, propaganda such as the Black Channel, or sporting achievement. It was important to fulfil this identity, as there were consistent pressures on the GDR from the West with the FRG's *Ostpolitik* policy, as well as from the East, from an interfering and concerned USSR.

While the 1972 Basic Treaty brought the international recognition that the SED wanted, it also threatened to open up the GDR to external and Western influences. The *Abgrenzung* policy tried to counter this, but struggled in its attempts to restrict cultural influence while taking the economic advantages that the FRG could offer. The GDR was in a unique position. It was a border state between East and West, as part of the USSR's buffer zone. But it was also the eastern half of a Germany that it partly wanted to reject, but at the same time wanted to work with. This generated many complicated pressures on the GDR. For a while, détente and *Ostpolitik* pulled in the same direction, but by the 1980s, the situation had changed. The USSR was trying to reinforce its political dominance, just as its economic ties were weakening beyond its control. The healthy international status of the GDR hid this growing dilemma.

ACTIVITY
SUMMARY

Relations between the GDR and the FRG in the period 1961–85

How can you support the opinions below?

1 During the period 1961–85, the division of post-war Germany looked increasingly permanent and the GDR was becoming more established as a separate state.

2 During the period 1961–85, the GDR was becoming increasingly dependent on the FRG and reunification was becoming more likely.

WIDER READING

Bushnell, N. and Leonard, A. *Germany Divided and Reunited 1945-91*, Hodder Education (2009)

Fulbrook, M. *The Two Germanies, 1945-1990: Problems of Interpretation*, Macmillan (1992)

Grieder, P. *The German Democratic Republic*, Palgrave Macmillan (2012)

Major, P. *Behind the Berlin Wall: East Germany and the Frontiers of Power*, OUP (2010)

Ross, C. *The East German Dictatorship*, Bloomsbury Academic (2002)

Taylor, F. *The Berlin Wall*, Bloomsbury (2009)

Waller, S. *From Defeat to Unity: Germany 1945-91*, Nelson Thornes (2009)

2b.3 Life in East Germany, 1949–85

KEY QUESTIONS

- Did the GDR create a successful welfare system?
- Did a combination of repression and support keep the SED in control?
- What was the role of the Protestant Church in the GDR?
- How far did Western influences have an impact on life in the GDR?

INTRODUCTION

The first phase of the history of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) can be seen as the period from its creation in 1949 to the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961. The legacy of the Second World War, the USSR's demands for high levels of reparations, the 1953 uprising and high levels of emigration made the GDR's first decade particularly challenging. The government had to focus on ways to secure the GDR's future from its very shaky foundations. The building of the Berlin Wall undoubtedly gave the GDR much more security.

In many ways the GDR's position by the mid-1970s looked very favourable. Honecker had created an extensive and generous welfare system, living standards were the highest within the Eastern bloc, relations with the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) were clearly bringing personal and economic benefits, and the GDR remained a trusted and valuable ally to the USSR. The GDR was becoming increasingly recognised diplomatically by the international community, it had significant sporting success, and most of the population participated in mass parades in an ordered state that had guaranteed employment and one of the highest proportions of working women in the entire world. The stability achieved by the 1970s meant that the GDR actively accepted migration from other communist states such as Vietnam.

But there was another side. The ruling Socialist Unity Party (SED) oversaw a secret security force that had grown considerably, consumer goods were generally inferior to Western products, and many people resented the restrictions on individual freedoms. For those whose loyalty to the state was seen as questionable, the repercussions could be severe. Measures ranged from blocking an individual's career, controls over where individuals could live, children being deliberately barred from their preferred university place, to the use of psychological torture and harsh prison sentences.

It is difficult to be certain about the extent of genuine popular support for the regime. The absence of major uprisings after 1953, the low crime rate, high membership in the SED's mass organisations and large turnouts at events such as May Day can be regarded as evidence of support for, or at least an acceptance of, the GDR and its government. On the other hand, such support can be seen as

1949 – Establishment of the GDR
SED declares that all culture has to be based on Marxist-Leninist ideology

1950 – Ministry for State Security is set up (Stasi)

1954 – *Jugendweihe* (secular youth ceremony, like confirmation) introduced

1957 – Mielke becomes head of the Stasi

1962 – Conscription is introduced

1964 – Alternative military service as construction workers (Bausoldaten) without bearing weapons introduced

1949 | 1952 | 1955 | 1958 | 1961 | 1964



suggesting a population that only displayed overt loyalty to the state to avoid any possible repercussions.

Overall, by the mid-1980s, a stable and in many ways apparently successful GDR had emerged. This was against the odds from what, less than 40 years earlier, had appeared to most to be the fragile and vulnerable foundation of a communist East Germany.

DID THE GDR CREATE A SUCCESSFUL WELFARE SYSTEM?

From the mid-1960s onwards, the SED was able to start introducing more generous social and welfare reforms. These had an ideological basis in working towards the creation of a fairer and more equal society, and there is evidence that many of these social reforms were based on good intentions, that is, the desire of the Party to meet the needs of the population. They also formed a part of a social contract that emerged in the 1960s: the government would provide social and welfare benefits and, in return, the population would show outward political loyalty and accept the authority of the SED. The SED attempted to keep its side of the bargain through improvements in the provision of housing, education and welfare provision, much of which was aimed at enhancing the role and status of women. The provision that was offered in the 1960s was often very progressive when compared with much of that on offer in the Western world, but by the end of the 1970s, good intentions had been undermined by economic shortcomings.

Housing

Housing was a major problem within the GDR and a common cause of popular dissatisfaction.

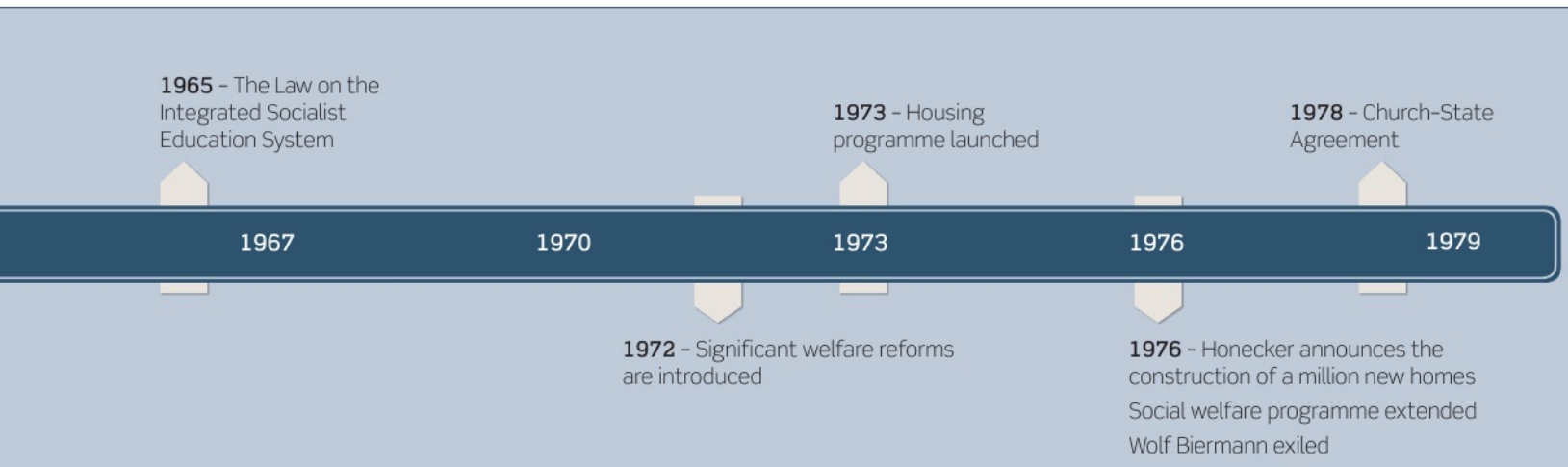
- There had been widespread damage to housing in urban areas, particularly Berlin and Dresden, during the Second World War. In the GDR as a whole, it is estimated that about 14 percent of its housing had been destroyed by 1945. Although the actual shortage of housing was somewhat alleviated by emigration during the 1950s, much of the remaining housing was in poor condition and often deteriorating. Statistics for the 1950s give a clear indication of these conditions, with over half of the homes having one or two rooms only. Less than one-third of homes included three or more rooms, and only three percent had central heating. The standard of the housing can also be seen by the fact that only 30 percent of homes had a toilet and 22 percent had a bath in the 1950s. By the mid-1970s, progress had been limited, with only 20 percent of homes having central heating and only 50 percent having a bath or shower.
- There was a growing need for housing in areas where new industries, such as chemicals and electronics, were being developed. The labour force had to be located around or near these new industries. Halle-Neustadt, founded in 1967, was built for workers at the new chemical plant, and Hoyerswerda, founded in 1955, was for workers at the brown coal-processing plant.

As well as providing desperately needed housing, building new residential communities was also part of the Party vision of creating socialist new towns. New housing for the masses near these new centres of industry was to be part of the development of society on communist lines. These housing estates included health centres, childcare centres, community centres and sports facilities. The interlinking of the workplace, housing and welfare provision was seen as leading to people's lives being totally influenced by official state ideology and policy.

However, the SED's particularly idealistic vision of creating socialist new towns became somewhat constrained by the overall economy. There was a clear focus on the quantity, rather than the quality, of the housing. The result was **prefabricated** and substandard housing. This method of cutting costs, and hence quality, became the standard model of East German housing.

KEY TERM

Prefabricated
Building parts made at factories and delivered to housing sites ready for assembly.



KEY TERM

Plattenbau
The use of large, prefabricated concrete slabs to make buildings. Virtually all new housing in the GDR from the 1960s onwards was constructed using this method.

The programme to significantly improve housing became one of Honecker's flagship policies. In 1976, it was announced that a million new homes would be built by 1990. Between 1971 and 1975, 400,000 new homes were built, and by 1980, the target had actually been exceeded with the rapid construction of **Plattenbau** housing. Honecker had poured resources into housing construction, and, unlike previous attempts, had included refurbishing older housing in pre-war districts, which had been ignored up to this point. Some 290,000 buildings were refurbished between 1971 and 1975. By the end of the 1980s, the SED had spent 200 billion East German marks on the programme.

Limitations and failures

- Despite the targets being reached, the real issue of quality of housing had not been addressed. The Plattenbau housing estates were relatively cheap and quick to assemble, but they took on a bleak and soulless appearance. Even the local population who lived on these estates referred to them in negative terms as 'stone deserts', 'lockers to keep workers in' and 'comfort cells'. Crime rates were usually higher on these estates, especially in the new towns. Halle Neustadt (nicknamed 'Hanoi'), had a crime rate that was 20 percent higher than that of the nearby old town of Halle.
- Despite the large increase in housing constructed during the 1970s, there remained a shortage. The result was that young couples often had to live with their parents even after they were married. This arrangement placed a strain on East German marriages and was to be factor cited in many divorces.
- Social inequality in housing remained. Members of the Party elite still lived in the best available housing, while many industrial workers continued to live in older, run-down housing districts. The elderly were also overlooked when it came to allocating new housing. The principle may have been to provide housing for all, but the reality, caused by shortages, led to prioritisation according to political standing or economic worth. Thus, Party officials and skilled workers, whose talents were much in demand, were able to secure much better housing and move up the waiting list for accommodation more quickly. The differences were often very sharp: in Leipzig in 1984, 60 percent of young, skilled professionals had accommodation with hot water and indoor toilets compared with only 15 percent of those living in older residential districts.

One of the greatest sources of frustration with respect to housing was the fact that people were dependent on the state for their housing provision. They had no personal control over the quality and state of repair of their living conditions or the chance of moving. This frustration resulted in housing issues being the main cause of letters of complaint to local Party officials.

SOURCE 1 Lenin Statue in East Berlin with Plattenbau housing behind.



Education

Even before the establishment of the GDR in 1949, extensive measures were put in place in the Soviet zone of occupation. The impact of the Second World War left much of the schooling system in disarray. Many buildings were damaged and, although attempts were made to repair or replace buildings, many schools were operating in bomb-damaged structures as late as the mid-1950s. In the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, nearly 80 percent of existing teachers in the Soviet zone had been dismissed from their posts as they were seen as having been too closely associated with Nazism. In the state of Thuringia, 97 percent of teachers had been members of the Nazi Party. The demand for new teachers was met by a recruitment programme that deliberately selected applicants from groups who had been persecuted by the Nazis, had emigrated from former German territories in the East and were from the working class. Due to the desperate need for new teachers in the classroom, these new recruits were given full-time teaching jobs after as little as two weeks' training.

In 1946, the Law for the Democratisation of German schools did away with gymnasiums – the traditional system of grammar schools for the academically minded – which were regarded as maintaining the upper and privileged social classes. In their place, co-educational ***Grundschules*** for six- to 14-year-olds were set up, after which children attended a secondary school or entered vocational training. This system was designed to raise the academic achievements of all students and avoid disadvantaging those from peasant or working-class backgrounds. Other elements of educational provision that were seen to restrict access were dealt with: private schools and Church schools were abolished. Universities deliberately favoured admitting students from working-class backgrounds and those from social groups that had suffered from Nazi persecution. Consequently, by the mid-1950s, approximately half of university students were from working-class homes.

KEY TERM

Grundschule
A primary school established in East Germany that catered for boys and girls of all abilities up to the age of 14.

The education policies of the GDR were designed to serve a range of goals:

- They focused on developing the technical skills required to support the continued development of the economy. This required the encouragement of creativity and initiative, which did not sit easily with the political purpose of the education system.
- They were also designed to reinforce political loyalty to the Party and to socialism. This aim gained greater prominence in the 1960s, with Party concerns about the spread of Western influences.
- Education was also a useful instrument in contributing towards effecting a transformation of society. It was to be used as a vehicle to promote greater equality, especially of opportunity, and to help towards the eventual goal of a communist state. This goal would also help bind much of the population to the state, as they would view the state's provision of education as part of the government's obligation to improve their working opportunities and social conditions.

The relative emphasis placed on each of these goals varied through the period 1949–85, as did their success.

The 1950s saw the move towards a comprehensive system of secondary education where pupils of all abilities followed the same general curriculum at a polytechnic school. For the final two years of secondary education, pupils were offered an academic route in an extended upper school (EOS) or a vocational route. There were, in addition, a small number of specialist schools for those children who excelled at sport, science or mathematics.

The curriculum was underpinned by socialist principles, especially after the Law on the Unified Socialist Education System was introduced in 1965. This law was introduced by Margot Honecker, wife of Erich, who served as Minister for Education from 1963 until 1989. She ensured that education was driven by the philosophy of the state and Party. Although polytechnic schools offered a general curriculum, there were several distinctive features of the East German provision.

- All pupils were required to study citizenship, a course that highlighted the political ideas of the state and the responsibilities that individuals had to contribute towards socialism.
- Russian was the modern foreign language studied by pupils. Study of English or French was discouraged.
- Links with industry and the world of work were developed. Twinning arrangements between schools and enterprises gave older pupils opportunities to undertake work experience. These programmes produced a mixed response. Some pupils were quickly disillusioned by dirty working conditions and mundane work, but for some it provided a route into a guaranteed apprenticeship.

EXTEND YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Margot Honecker (1927–present)
Margot Honecker was the most senior female political figure in the GDR as Minister for Education from 1963 to 1989. She married Erich Honecker in 1953. She was well-known for her hard-line political views and she introduced military training into schools and ordered teachers to report any incidents of students not following communist ideology. She earned the nickname 'Miss Information'.

Those in the polytechnic schools wishing to go to university would be expected to take the academic route, but the GDR was careful to ensure that those taking the vocational route could progress into higher education. Further education and night-school courses were offered and these provided a useful channel for those who showed ability so that they could gain access to university. In this respect, the GDR offered many chances of gaining a higher education for a wide range of the population, certainly more than was usual in the West at this time.

During the early 1960s, the discrimination against university applicants from more middle-class backgrounds was gradually abandoned. This was partly a deliberate incentive to dissuade young people from emigrating to the FRG. It also aimed to increase student numbers studying mathematics, science and technology in order to facilitate the New Economic System. However, by the 1970s there was a need to reduce university places, as the GDR began to have a workforce that was overqualified for the jobs available.

This fall in university places increased the need for applicants to demonstrate more political conformity. In most instances it was sufficient merely to show passive conformity to the state. The SED maintained control over universities either through student membership of the Free German Youth (FDJ) or by placing Party members in senior university teaching and administration roles. As well as studying their main subjects, all university students had to study Marxism-Leninism, learn Russian and participate regularly in sports activities. However, some groups found it more difficult to enter their preferred choice of university or course (see Source 2). This included those who had not participated in the ***Jugendweihe*** or had opted not to do military service, which was introduced in 1962. As an alternative, individuals could opt to work as 'construction soldiers' (*Bausoldaten*) on building projects, such as housing or roads, but this was regarded as disloyal to the GDR and jeopardised later educational and career choices.

KEY TERM

Jugendweihe
A coming-of-age ceremony for 14-year-olds that marked the dedication of youth to the state. It was introduced in 1954. Going through this ceremony was seen as a sign of loyalty to the Party.

SOURCE 2 The recollections of Sylvia Gabriel, who attended secondary school in Dresden from 1966 until 1976. She trained as a drafter and completed a degree in civil engineering. Her father was an independent master carpenter and her mother was a private music teacher.

In my class in high school the family origins were most diverse. I knew that some parents were employed by the Stasi or the army. There were also *Arbeiterkinder* (working-class children)... However, as children, we all got along nicely with each other and these different backgrounds played no part on class trips or at birthday celebrations.

In 8th grade, you had to decide about your next step in education. Since I was quite good at school at this time (all but four subjects at the top grade), I wanted to attend an EOS (similar to a grammar school today).

I applied and later a notification was given about who was allowed to study further at the EOS. Here, I felt for the first time that this pathway in education was not open to me, with my background. Due to my very good performance, I would certainly have been entitled to such a place.

They did not justify it with the occupation of my parents but that I had shown an 'unsatisfactory performance' and therefore would not be entitled.

Later, we learned that a boy in my class, who had committed himself to three years in the army, got this place. His average grade was lower than mine.

When the anger had subsided, we thought about how I can develop now and what chances I still have to achieve my goal. I then completed the 10th grade with 'distinction' and wanted to study to be a cartographer.

I was told that I could not learn and practise this profession because I had 'West Relatives' whom I have not declared on my application form. For this occupation you were not allowed to have contacts in the West because you had access to all maps of the world. A cousin of my father, who had no connection to me, was the reason.

The education system that had developed in the GDR had provided opportunities for citizens to better their job prospects and improve their quality of life. Its aim of making available continuing opportunities for learning throughout a person's career was to be commended, but the reality was to become limited by the increasing use of education as an instrument through which political loyalty could be tested and rewarded.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

Education in the GDR

1 Look at Source 2. Using the content of the source and the information given about the author, what can we learn about access to university in the GDR during the 1970s?

2 How far did the GDR's education system meet the needs of its population?

The changing status and role of women

There were two main principles that formed the basis for the SED's policies towards women:

- First, there was a need to reverse the GDR's demographics of an ageing and declining population, which was partly, but not sufficiently, solved with the building of the Berlin Wall.
- Second, there was the ideological need to work towards achieving greater gender equality both in the workplace and in the home.

Both of these principles encouraged a drive to raise the status of women and change their role from the traditional housewife into a more economically productive citizen.

The Family Code of 1966 stated that in order to ensure the development of socialist personalities and to promote female employment, men and women should share equally in childcare and domestic work. The Code emphasised women's equality in marriage and family. It was expected that a husband and wife would have an arrangement, which allowed both to develop their abilities for themselves and for the benefit of society. Therefore, it provided for a woman's right to control her own life. This independence for women was partly a product of the distorted demography of the GDR. The Second World War had created a higher proportion of women to men, while emigration to the FRG during the 1950s was disproportionately made up of younger men.

Although the SED's policies towards women, which were intended to increase the birth rate, proved to be successful, the extent to which gender equality was achieved in the home and workplace is debatable.

The Eighth SED Congress of 1971 introduced a range of new social policies aimed at improving the working and living conditions of women. Abortion was legalised in 1972 and contraceptives became available free of charge. Welfare reforms were used to try to counteract the falling birth rate. Incentives for mothers included the extension of maternity leave from 18 to 26 weeks. All mothers received a lump sum of DM1,000 when their baby was born. Working hours were limited to 40 a week for mothers and they were not required to do shift work or overtime. Help was also given with housework, with mothers receiving one day off work every month to carry out domestic duties. This help was also provided to single fathers. Crèches and nursery schools were expanded, and by 1974, 60 percent of infants up to the age of three were placed in such facilities. This figure exceeded much of the Western world at the time. These measures proved popular with women, but in some respects they preserved traditional roles rather than reduced them – the support was for mothers rather than women. The traditional attitude towards 'men's' and 'women's' work was remarkably persistent in the GDR.

By the late 1980s, the GDR had one of the highest proportions of female employment in the world (around 90 percent, compared to 50 percent in the FRG). Their role in the economic well-being of the GDR had been taken seriously by the government. Social policy, especially increased access for women to further and higher education, had made important strides towards gender equality and reducing the dependence of women on men.

Nonetheless, the status of women was not always equal to that of men. Women made up a much higher proportion of the workforce in lower-paid and unskilled jobs. Further, while women made up half of all teachers and doctors by the mid-1980s, the majority of higher-level positions were held by men. Women were very under-represented in senior politics: the only female minister in the GDR's history was Margot Honecker, and her role as Minister of Education did not give her a place in the Politburo.

EXTEND YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Sexuality in the GDR

The GDR was genuinely progressive regarding sexuality. The emphasis placed on increasing the economic independence of women resulted in women demanding more in the bedroom. By the 1970s, it was common for women to want a sexually fulfilling relationship, and many were prepared to end a relationship where this need was not being met. The state's social policy made singlehood, even single motherhood, possible and acceptable. This contrasted with the portrayal of women as sexual objects, as was common in the West. As one East German woman in her late 40s put it, when asked about attitudes to sex after reunification, 'East-women have more fun, everybody knows that.'

Attitudes to homosexuality were also progressive in some respects. Homosexuality was made legal in the Criminal Code of 1957 and struck out of the Criminal Code altogether in 1968. Although frowned upon by the Party, lesbians and gay men were allowed to socialise in public places with considerable freedom and toleration. By the early 1980s, the Ministry of Health was raising concerns about the spread of AIDS and the impact this could have on homosexual men in the GDR.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

The role and status of women in the GDR

How far did the role and status of women in the GDR change in the 1970s and 1980s?

The development of an extensive social welfare programme

The government viewed good health as essential for high productivity, and as a result it devoted considerable resources to its promotion. Health-care systems were provided on a collective basis, according to need, with a series of polyclinics based in every district. The polyclinics offered a range of general health care and some specialist treatment through teams of doctors and nurses. In 1971, a choice of doctor within the polyclinic was allowed, a response to patients' demands.

Much of the health care was based on preventative medicine and early diagnosis. Welfare measures that eased the working load of mothers also helped to improve the general health of the female population. For the elderly and disabled, care homes were provided by the state, but many preferred to live in the family home.

The increasing demands of the population for improvements in welfare provision led to a series of measures being announced

at the Ninth Party Congress in May 1976. The SED was aware that welfare provision was one method of keeping social stability, minimising the attraction of the West and providing good publicity for the GDR in the international arena. It duly introduced increases in the minimum wage, a 20 percent rise in pensions and, for working mothers, increased holiday entitlement.

Results

- In the 1960s and 1970s, the GDR was able to bring about real improvements in the health of its population. Life expectancy increased to levels comparable with the West. Pre- and antenatal care was another area where success was tangible. As early as 1959, the number of mothers dying in childbirth was lower than occurred in the FRG.
- Social welfare provision aimed at supporting mothers, and therefore encouraging the birth rate to rise, was successful. Mothers with children under the age of 18 were entitled to shorter working hours and had more days of paid holiday. In 1985, the East German birth rate was 13.7 per thousand, higher than the 9.6 per thousand of the FRG.
- In terms of quantity, welfare provision in the GDR was good. In 1970, there were just under 160 doctors per hundred thousand people, rising to 242 in 1989. The number of hospital beds in 1977 was at a level comparable with that of the FRG. However, quantity was no guarantee of quality. Even the most basic medical equipment was often in short supply. In the early 1970s, hospitals were complaining of a lack of rubber gloves and syringes.
- By the end of the 1970s, economic resources for social provision were increasingly under pressure. This was partly a result of the worsening economic situation in the GDR, but it was also due to an increasingly aged population, coupled with the spiralling costs of new technology. Government statements and promises had resulted in higher expectations, and that put pressure on the health-care system.
- Care of the economically unproductive was far less impressive than that directed at mothers and workers, especially care of the elderly and the disabled. They were often placed in care homes where staff may have had good intentions, but they were given very little training and physical resources were poor. However, mothers of severely disabled children were allowed extra days off work to help provide care in their own home.
- Limited economic resources led to a system of prioritisation whereby the best facilities, often at university hospitals, were reserved for top Party officials and specialised workers who were seen as vital to the economy. The Party leadership were treated at the Berlin-Buch hospital in relatively comfortable conditions, with the most up-to-date technology the GDR could afford.

The development of social welfare in the GDR was to echo the general theme of good intentions undermined by economic shortcomings. The records of the Ministry of Health reveal that Ludwig Mecklinger, Honecker's Minister for Health, was forceful in presenting the case for extending welfare provision on humanitarian grounds, as well as political ones, but he was thwarted by the influence of Mittag at the Ministry for the Economy. The promotion of good health could also be limited by the social attitudes of many East Germans, who were heavy eaters and drinkers.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

Social policy

1 What criteria would you use to judge the success of the social and welfare policies of the GDR?

2 How successful were the social and welfare policies of the GDR in bringing about social change by 1985?

3 What were the main obstacles to their success?

ACTIVITY
WRITING

Degrees of change: words as precision tools

The following are words used to describe different degrees of change:

Transformation; fundamental; superficial; ephemeral; partial; revolution; underlying; deep-seated; central; insignificant; temporary; façade; upheaval; inconsequential.

1 Give definitions of these terms. You may need to use a dictionary to check their exact meaning.

2 Rank these words on a scale from those denoting a very large change to those that describe no change.

3 Which words would best describe the degree of change that occurred in the GDR between 1961 and 1985 for the following aspects of social policy?

a) Housing provision

b) Education

c) The role of women

d) Social welfare provision.

A Level Exam-Style Question Section B

How effective were the social welfare programmes of the GDR in meeting the needs of its population between 1949 and 1985? (20 marks)

Tip

This question requires you to define the needs of the population of the GDR and then assess whether the social welfare programmes of the government met them. Make sure you come to a reasoned judgement about the degree to which these needs were successfully met.

DID A COMBINATION OF REPRESSION AND SUPPORT KEEP THE SED IN CONTROL?

The most obvious and visible form of state repression and control of its own population was the Berlin Wall, and during its existence it became increasingly difficult to attempt escape. During the 1970s and early 1980s, modifications were made by creating a second wall on the GDR side. The area between this second wall and the original wall became known as the 'death strip' and included watchtowers, mines and guard dogs. The Wall and the inner-German border were guarded by GDR soldiers and border troops, who received honours and extra pay and buildings or roads named in their honour if they killed a GDR citizen attempting to cross into West Berlin or the FRG.

Various escape attempts made from East to West Berlin, or from the GDR to the FRG, included hot-air balloons, driving at high speed through a checkpoint, hiding in suitcases and digging tunnels. It is estimated that there were approximately 5,000 successful escape attempts from the GDR to the FRG between August 1961 and the opening of the Wall in November 1989. However, during the Wall's existence, nearly 200 people were shot at the border, and by the mid-1970s almost 5,000 had been held in GDR prisons, with sentences from two to eight years for attempting flight from the republic.

The Ministry of State Security (the Stasi): its methods and activities

The Stasi and the SED

The State Security Service was set up in 1950 to defend the GDR against any acts of sabotage, from within East Germany as well as by agents working for the capitalist West. It saw itself as both the shield to protect the GDR and the sword to attack, but colloquially it was known as 'The Firm' and was given authority directly from the Politburo to protect the GDR's socialist achievements and the border.

At its beginning, the Stasi employed approximately 1,000 full-time staff, and within three years this rose to around 4,000. After the 1953 uprising, the leader of the Stasi, Wilhelm Zaisser, was removed and replaced by Erich Mielke. Mielke remained in charge until the collapse of the GDR in 1990, and it was under his guidance that the Stasi grew in scale and influence. By the late 1980s, the organisation had more than 90,000 full-time employees, as well as using an estimated 175,000 **IMs (Informal Members)**. The particularly rapid increase in the Stasi's size in the 1970s was a direct response to counteract what many in the SED saw as the negative effects of *Ostpolitik*, such as the increased exposure of GDR citizens to visitors from the FRG and West Berlin. Under Honecker, Mielke became a member of the Politburo, the Minister for the Stasi.

The range of the Stasi's activities

The Stasi's work was designed to create a climate of fear among the general population and deal with any undermining of the SED. The Stasi had direct authority to open mail, bug homes, access bank statements, view medical records and use psychological torture. Cameras and recording equipment were hidden in ties, briefcases and cigarette boxes. The Stasi worked at border crossings, passport offices, hotels and airports, as well as in factories, universities, the armed forces, hospitals, schools and the Church.

In the 1970s, the Stasi had to refine its methods. As part of the *Abegrenzung* policy, to counter Western influence, its role was to root out the enemies of socialism in all forms of social life. The Stasi even operated at least one brothel in an effort to gather useful information, especially from Western visitors. However, as the GDR became more accepted on the world stage, the Stasi had to reign in its more violent methods of control. Individuals and opposition groups were targeted with a series of subtle attacks to destroy their reputation. Telephones were bugged (over 1,000 phones a day were bugged just in the city of Leipzig); false rumours were spread; burglaries took place; and the post was investigated (in Dresden, around five percent of all post was opened and read by the Stasi every day). This barrage of shady tactics would break down the opposition over time and was therefore known as 'operational decomposition'.

Other functions of the Stasi included collating 'mood reports' for the SED to ascertain public opinion. This was then used to help determine government policy or areas to focus on for propaganda, especially at critical points such as the building of the Berlin Wall or the uprising in Czechoslovakia. The Stasi had a department that worked in foreign countries, especially in the FRG, to obtain secret information. At certain times the Stasi also liaised with terrorist groups around the world, such as the **Irish Republican Army (IRA)**, the **Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO)** and the left-wing **Red Army Faction** in the FRG. This would involve bringing members of these terrorist groups into the GDR for arming, training and financial support, as well as sending agents out as military advisers. Yet, while welcoming this support from the Stasi, none of these organisations depended on it.

KEY TERMS

IM (Informal Member)
A person recruited to work as an informer for the Stasi for short periods of time, usually to target a specific individual. It is estimated that, by the 1980s, almost 175,000 IMs were being used to inform on family members, friends and colleagues.

Irish Republican Army (IRA)
An Irish nationalist group that carried out a campaign of terrorist acts against British rule in Northern Ireland during the 1970s and 1980s.

Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO)
A group that waged a terrorist campaign against the state of Israel.

Red Army Faction
A left-wing terrorist group that operated within the FRG. Also known as the Baader-Meinhof Gang, after its leaders Andreas Baader and Ulrike Meinhof. The group was particularly active in the 1970s and was responsible for at least 34 deaths in the FRG. It continued to exist until 1998.

EXTEND YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Erich Mielke (1907–2000)

Mielke joined the KPD (German Communist Party) in 1925 and, in 1931, fled Germany for the USSR after assassinating two police officers. He then fought in the Spanish Civil War, and during the Second World War he worked for the Resistance in Nazi-occupied France. In the post-war Soviet zone of occupation, he played a key part in setting up a security force.

Mielke was rapidly promoted within the Ministry of State Security, becoming its head in 1957, due to his connections with the USSR and loyalty to Ulbricht. He opposed *Ostpolitik* and argued that it would strengthen the FRG and weaken the GDR. Consequently, he used this argument to justify the expansion of the Stasi.

After the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989, Mielke resigned with other leading SED members of the government. He later spent five months in prison on remand after he was charged with ordering the shooting of East Germans trying to cross the Berlin Wall. The trial was postponed so that he could also be charged with murdering two police officers in 1931, for which he served four years of a six-year sentence. It was then judged that he was too ill to face trial for his actions as Minister of the State Security System during the history of the GDR.

Reasons for collaborating with the Stasi

There are a whole range of reasons why individuals collaborated with the Stasi. The Ministry devoted resources to its own psychology department in Potsdam, near Berlin, which researched ways to recruit individuals who would willingly collaborate with the Stasi. The Stasi was against individuals making voluntary denunciations about others and preferred to recruit collaborators, which they felt would improve both the quality and reliability of their information.

After checks were made on the recruitment of a potential informer, individuals would be approached by a Stasi recruitment officer. Some individuals did resist recruitment, whereas others agreed to co-operate and signed an official document to collect information on others. There were various reasons why individuals from all walks of society agreed to co-operate, and it is important not to make generalisations.

- Some felt that they were supporting the GDR's path to a communist utopia and that it was important to seek out those disloyal to the regime. These individuals were regarded as the most committed and productive.
- Others were attracted by material rewards, career opportunities and what they felt was a higher social status. For some, it allowed them to gain the university place of their choice or the opportunity of better employment. The Stasi was generally opposed to cash rewards, but in a society that suffered from consumer shortages, some were attracted by the promise of an apartment, a car, a telephone or a holiday. Others were individuals in more vulnerable positions. For example, the parent of a handicapped child might be offered a place for their child at a special school for the disabled.
- There were also instances where the Stasi used coercion to recruit collaborators. Although such recruitment was regarded as a last resort, there were occasions when individuals were blackmailed. This included recruiting individuals whose behaviour, such as extramarital affairs, drug use or homosexuality, had not come to light and they were therefore open to blackmail. The Stasi threatened to publically reveal such potentially damaging information unless the individual collaborated.

The IMs performed a wide variety of tasks. Some IMs were full-time, while others were used for specific security tasks, which usually required spying on fellow employees. The elite officers managed other IMs, infiltrated opposition groups and worked to ruin their targets' lives. However, the majority of IMs (over 80 percent by 1988) were used to report the citizens' attitudes towards the GDR and SED. By 1985, this equated to one IM per 120 citizens. Though turnover of IMs was high (roughly ten percent a year during the 1980s), the Stasi successfully replaced them. It was this significant level of integration within society that made the Stasi such an efficient and feared organisation.

SOURCE 3 An interview with a former Stasi officer. This interview was conducted by the writer Anna Funder in 2003 and published the same year. She asks the officer about the qualities he looked for when recruiting an informer. This is his reply.

> Well he had to be able to adapt to new situations quickly and make himself belong wherever we put him. And at the same time he had to have a stable enough character to keep it clear in his mind that he was reporting to us. And above all else he needed to be honest, faithful and trustworthy.
>
> I mean towards the ministry, of course. We weren't interested if he betrayed anyone else... this ability is not a great quality in a human being. But it was vital for our work.
>
> ... some of them were convinced of the cause, but I think it was mainly because informers got the feeling that, doing it, they were somebody. You know – someone was listening to them for a couple of hours a week, taking notes. They felt they had it over other people.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

Informers

Look at Source 3. How valuable is this source to the historian investigating the Stasi's use of informers and the reasons why people became informers?

An assessment of Stasi methods

The driving force behind the Stasi's levels of surveillance was the core belief that the danger to the GDR from negative forces was present at every possible section of society. This paranoia equated an anti-socialist opinion as bad as an anti-socialist act, and therefore strove to root it out. Enemies could be anywhere or anyone and, therefore, the gathering of all information, however insignificant it seemed, was carried out. Items on a shopping list; the time house lights were turned off; the smell of an individual were all recorded and stored. The sheer depth of Stasi infiltration into society and the amount of secret collaboration from the public was only revealed when vast Stasi files began to be opened

up in 1990, but during the lifetime of the GDR, at least 600,000 people were Stasi agents, and some put the figure as high as two million. It was an organisation set up along military lines, which owned a large arsenal of weapons, had its own university degrees and awarded its own medals, though these had to be returned so that they could not be accidently discovered and an agent's cover exposed.

The Stasi worked alongside the foreign intelligence organisation, the National People's Army (NVA) and the border troops, to protect the SED's control of the GDR. But the Stasi was the invisible presence of this control. It was the work of the Stasi that led to the imprisonment of between 200,000 and 250,000 people for political reasons between 1949 and 1989. It is impossible to measure the damage to careers and disruption to a normal life that the Stasi inflicted upon the citizenship. The SED promised social security for its people with an extensive welfare programme, but it was accompanied by a surveillance system that stripped self-confidence from the people.

SOURCE 4 From a speech given to members of the Stasi, by Erich Mielke, on the 25th anniversary of the founding of the Ministry for State Security, 1975.

> From the very beginning the MfS [Ministry for State Security] was confronted with the responsibility of, in co-operation with the other police and security organs, securing the GDR against all enemy attacks...
>
> To consistently fulfil this task it was necessary to apply special means and methods in the struggle against the enemy. It was essential to offensively penetrate the conspiratorial plots of the enemies, to recognise their intentions in time, to investigate their enemy plans, where they were being contrived, to guarantee an effective defensive action and to detect internal enemy forces and render them harmless.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

The role of the Stasi

Explain the range of motives of those who decided to collaborate with the Stasi.

Control of young people through the Free German Youth (FDJ)

As well as the SED's controls on education, the government aimed to influence young people outside of school and university, with the Free German Youth (FDJ) for 14- to 25-year-olds, and the Young Pioneers (JP) for the six to 14 age group. From the very beginning, the groups were deliberately mixed-gender, to differentiate these youth organisations from those that had existed under the Nazi government. The FDJ's official newspaper, *Junge Welt* (Young World), had the largest circulation of any GDR paper, at 1.4 million in the 1950s.

After 1957, the FDJ and JP were the only youth organisations officially acknowledged by the SED. Membership was not compulsory, but most young people joined, as failure to attend could easily jeopardise future university places and career choices. Active involvement in the FDJ was essential, for example, for anyone who wished to study for prestigious careers such as medicine, as the FDJ had a say in the selection process for all university places. Once they had left school or completed an apprenticeship, membership dropped to only around one-third of 18- to 25-year-olds.

The FDJ controlled a considerable array of organisations, over 28,000, in which they encouraged youth participation along SED lines. The Statute of the FDJ was to 'prepare its best members for admission as candidates into the Communist Party', and it sought all members to 'develop and hold an unshakable socialist standpoint'. This indoctrination would be achieved through a mixture of political activities and more fun-oriented social events. These included holiday camps, youth clubs and discos, which were popular – over one million pupils (out of a total 2.2 million in the GDR) attended a holiday camp in 1983. The ever-present political message was often ignored by the members, while the authorities tried to keep the participants interested. In the early 1980s, the FDJ executive reluctantly allowed rock music to be played in the discos and started to organise rock festivals, such as the Festival for Political Songs, which attracted performers from around 30 countries each year.

THINKING HISTORICALLY Evidence (5b)

The importance of context

Documents (texts) are like small pieces torn from a larger tapestry (context). Historians have to reconstruct the larger pattern into which documents might fit in order to use them to construct accounts of the past. The problem is that texts can have multiple contexts. Historians often debate how best to contextualise the documents that they interpret.

Source 4 is a speech by Erich Mielke to members of the Stasi, including new recruits.

1 Summarise some key points from Source 4.

2 As well as noting the content of the source, it is important to consider Mielke's audience when he was speaking. Why did Mielke share these thoughts with new Stasi recruits?

The source might seem to have one kind of meaning when interpreted in the context of developments within the Stasi. A contrasting interpretation appears if we locate it in another context: there is good reason to think that Mielke wished to share his views on the role of the Stasi with the wider population.

3 Why might Mielke have shared his views of the Stasi (secret police) with the general population of the GDR?

4 Use information from your own knowledge of the GDR at the time to construct a possible context for what Mielke said. Think about SED policies at this time, *Ostpolitik* and the involvement of the GDR in the Helsinki Accords of 1975.

5 Why is it important for historians to spend time thinking about possible contexts for a document before they start to use it to draw conclusions about the past?

The FDJ played a more political role in school. The Hans-Beimler contests were military sports events partly run by the FDJ. The more committed members were involved in denouncing rebellious pupils and spying on inappropriate activities. The SED tried to coax the youth away from the emerging environmental and peace pressure groups that were gaining in popularity in the 1980s, by encouraging the FDJ to take ownership of these issues, despite the FDJ's emphasis on military training. For a while, the FDJ urged its members that it was 'better Active than Radioactive', but the FDJ struggled to compete with other influences.

The impact of the FDJ is hard to measure. While some youths gained experience of political office through the organisation, which then opened up a career in the Party, most young East Germans put up with the propaganda in order to gain access to the more leisure-based activities. The blue shirt, with its rising sun emblem, was not seen as a symbol of a new dawn for the GDR youth, but a uniform to be loosely worn to necessitate entry to the disco. For the fashionable youth, it was a uniform to be discarded at the first possible opportunity.

By the early 1980s, most young people preferred to spend time informally with friends and listen to Western music, and follow Western trends that the FDJ, and increasingly the SED, could not control. Throughout the entire span of the GDR, the FDJ struggled to find a balance between relaxing the rigid approach to control and cementing youth loyalty to the SED. In 1964, Ulbricht had criticised the FDJ's unimaginative response to young people's needs, while he also insisted on its use of indoctrination. The same problems remained two decades later.

SOURCE 5 From the instruction manual for Young Pioneer teachers, 1970.

> The child needs to be moved to the deepest of love for East Germany, and the deepest of commitments to its socialist agenda, and to passionate disdain for the imperialistic enemies of our people.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

The Pioneers

Look at Source 5. This source is a statement of the aims of the Young Pioneers organisation.

1 Use your own knowledge of the context of this organisation to explain why the SED wanted to achieve these aims.

2 Source 5 gives no indication of the success of the Pioneers in achieving these aims. Use your own knowledge to assess whether or not these aims were achieved by 1985.

SOURCE 6 The recollections of Gregor Kinast (born 1974). Gregor grew up in Dresden. Here he is reminiscing about his experiences in the FDJ. Taken from an interview conducted in 2014.

> ... as a member of the FDJ you now got a dark blue shirt (and no scarf). What a promotion! Now you were finally big, now you were grown up...
>
> Our school, like many schools in our area, had a youth club in the basement. This was mainly for discos or just parties. This club was supervised by members of the FDJ. This meant, for example, if we needed technology (new cassette deck, or mixer), we could apply to the FDJ management to get one. The funds were usually approved. ... we had therefore the most and, especially in the summer, the 'hottest beautiful' parties in our neighbourhood...
>
> On the whole, we had otherwise no other benefits of being in the FDJ. It was rather the opposite: you may have had disadvantages in later education and employment if you refused to join the FDJ. After all the FDJ was only one part of a political system.

AS Level Exam-Style Question Section A

How much weight do you give the evidence of Source 6 for an enquiry into support for the FDJ in the 1970s?

Explain your answer using the source, the information given about it and your own knowledge of the historical context. (12 marks)

Tip

Does your own knowledge of the FDJ support or challenge the impression given by the source? Do you think the views expressed in this source were typical of young people in the GDR?

SOURCE 7 An FDJ torchlight procession for the 30th anniversary of the founding of the GDR, 1979.



ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

The FDJ

1 What can we learn from Source 7 about attitudes of young people to the FDJ?

2 Why might this particular event have resulted in a large gathering?

3 Does your own knowledge of the FDJ support or challenge the impression given by the source?

Propaganda and censorship

The SED deliberately used a combination of extensive propaganda and censorship to promote the GDR and the USSR, and to denigrate the FRG and its Western allies. At various times during the history of the GDR, the nature and extent of these controls changed.

In 1950, the SED's Third Party Congress declared that all culture had to be based on Marxist-Leninist ideological principles. Consequently, a significant emphasis was placed on Soviet literature, plays and films, as well as banning Western works that were non-communist. There was also the promotion of classic German literature, music, drama and art, with the GDR portrayed as the genuine representative of Germany's achievements. Ordinary working-class Germans during the Third Reich were portrayed as the victims of fascism.

While the GDR, as with other Eastern bloc states, had to portray socialism as the only political ideology that could offer hope for its people, it also had to continually defend itself in comparisons with the FRG. This tended to be done by both sides attacking the other. The GDR highlighted the social problems found in the West, such as homelessness, drugs and unemployment, while fending off accusations of totalitarianism and a lack of personal freedoms, especially to travel, which the construction of the Berlin Wall only escalated.

To the West, the Wall became an object that was easy to criticise. The artists' graffiti showed that it was even possible to paint your criticism onto the Wall directly. To the GDR it was a much harder sell. East Germans, they claimed, were being caught like flies on flypaper by the West to be economically exploited, and therefore the Wall became a 'protective barrier'. The SED tried to depict the Wall as the essence of security, behind which a new GDR could be built (see Source 8).

The GDR did have control of all aspects of the mass media within the GDR. With the exception of Church newspapers, no papers were independent, and the Church was only permitted to write religious and non-political articles. The government controlled a range of radio and television stations, but the Western ones were always more popular. Overtly political propaganda shows, such as the *Black Channel*, did not necessarily make for popular viewing (they had around five percent of audience share).

During the 1970s, as the GDR tried to manufacture a national identity, propaganda was used extensively to promote the GDR as a unique and non-German state. References to a shared German culture were removed from names and institutions, while military propaganda increased. However, the success of this appears to have been limited, given the rapid push for reunification by the East German public after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Popular culture proved difficult to control, as the GDR versions were simply drowned out by the more sophisticated media from the West.

SOURCE 8 A poster produced to celebrate the thirtieth anniversary of the GDR in 1979. The caption reads '... and tomorrow I will be building!'.



The state had greater success with the control of more high-brow cultural output. The SED was fearful of the influence of writers, as it saw them as fostering a rebellious spirit seen in both the Hungarian Revolution (1956) and Prague Spring (1968). Therefore, writers were treated as potential enemies at the outset of their careers, regardless of their loyalty. Intellectual spheres were heavily infiltrated by IMs, and special surveillance campaigns (known as OVs) were orchestrated for years against individual writers like Reiner Kunnze and Gabriele Eckart. Some leading art figures were in fact Stasi agents. Sascha Anderson, a leading poet and front-runner of East Berlin's underground culture in the 1980s, worked to paralyse the scene by controlling contacts, spying and informing on artists.

Censorship

The experience of writers showed the way that propaganda and the Stasi combined to impose censorship on the GDR. Though the constitution expressly forbade censorship, the one-party rule of the SED meant that all areas of publications underwent censorship. First, this was done internally through the publisher, but then the government organisation looked at the degree of censorship needed and the extent of publication allowed, such as foreign publishers or just the GDR. No negative portrayal of communism or the GDR was permitted, and topics involving issues that the SED found 'crude' (such as crime or pornography) were actively discouraged. Press releases several times a week, from the Public Relations Office, made it clear what stories could run and the angle the SED wanted presented. All professional journalists were trained by the state and selected for their loyalty and political views.

A good example of the censorship system can be seen in the 1965 film *The Rabbit Is Me*, which highlighted judicial corruption and political subversion. Not surprisingly, it was banned, but the SED approved another film at the same time, *Hands Up or I'll Shoot* (a crime comedy that was accused of having hidden agendas), despite the censor already cutting 22 scenes. The arbitrary nature of these bans, known as 'rabbit films', shows that the nature of censorship often depended on the circumstances around who censored it and who created it rather than any supposed political message.

Most writers and artists tried to work within the guidelines of censorship in order to get published. Most propaganda was ignored, though that does not mean Western media was automatically believed. While Western news programmes were seen as an important source of more honest information to East Germans, the most popular shows were American prime-time shows like *Dallas* and *Dynasty*. The soap opera lives of the super-rich offered an escape from everyday reality, if only for an hour each evening.

Unfortunately for the SED, propaganda was most effective on the Party itself, as it came to believe it was creating a utopia within the GDR that was politically free and enjoyed higher living standards than the West. This faith stopped the leadership from reacting quickly to events in the 1980s as they spiralled out of control. Its own people were less convinced by the Party propaganda. However, to characterise the East German people as completely hostile to the regime would be an exaggeration.

EXTEND YOUR KNOWLEDGE

The strange case of the attempted assassination of Erich Honecker (31 December 1982)

In January 1983, the West German magazine *Stern* reported that Paul Essling, a 41-year-old heating engineer, had tried to kill Honecker on New Year's Eve because he was angry about the SED's elite lifestyle. Essling had come across the leader's motorcade and tried to ram Honecker's Citroën with his Lada. Other cars prevented this and Essling then shot at a policeman before committing suicide. This would have been the first assassination attempt on an East German politician, and Essling's use of a gun raised many questions, as access to guns was heavily restricted.

As usual, the East German media ignored the reports, hoping interest would fade, but the West German media continued to report the story. Nearly two weeks later, the GDR's General German News Agency confirmed that a drunken driver had wounded a policeman. There was no mention that it was an attempted assassination, or of the use of a gun, or even of Honecker's motorcade.

For East German citizens, this story was an extreme version of what, to them, was a daily task – namely deciding which media could be trusted more. The truth, more often than not, was somewhere in the middle.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

Methods of controlling the population

1 Make a list of the main methods used by the government to control the population.

2 Now rank these methods in order of importance.

3 Were all sections of the population targeted in the same way? Explain your answer.

4 Which sections of the population would be a) easier and b) more difficult to control? Give reasons for your choices.

Extent of popular support for the GDR

During the Cold War period, most Western historians and political commentators portrayed the GDR as a communist dictatorship that simply relied on repression to maintain control of a population that was effectively imprisoned by the Berlin Wall and the inner-German border. Since the end of the Cold War, historians' analyses of the GDR have led to a wider range of arguments and a general agreement that the history of the GDR is more complex.

Historians such as Mary Fulbrook have emphasised the large-scale numbers of GDR citizens who co-operated with the regime and were actually committed to working towards the eventual creation of a communist state. Further, rather than simply being a ruthless dictatorial government, the SED actually tried to respond where it could to the population's grievances.

Other historians have discussed the public's outward appearance of loyalty. Some explain the GDR's stability as due to the development of what has been described as a '**niche society**' – a term that was first used by the FRG's journalist and diplomatic representative to the GDR, Günter Gaus. He argued that East Germans came to accept the GDR and managed as best they could. Further, most recognised that the GDR had the highest living standards in the Eastern bloc, which fostered a certain acceptance of the more repressive aspects of the SED's rule.

KEY TERM

Niche society
A term used to show how the slow pace of life in the GDR, compared with the FRG, allowed more time for individuals to talk to one another. The result was a retreat away from the SED-dominated public world to a series of semi-private niches, such as family life.

Many people identified the improvements in social welfare and security as the key characteristic of the GDR, but this does not necessarily translate into an acceptance of the ideological restrictions that were imposed. By the 1970s, there was a generation of East Germans that had only experienced life under SED rule, and therefore, perhaps they were more tolerant of the system. Yet the Stasi continued to grow, unable to trust its own population. At a fundamental level, the life of an average person in the GDR was one of normal routines. The SED might not have won a free election, but it did enough to create a stable society. It was a matter of living a dual existence. In public, the citizen was a supporter, at least passively, of the GDR, but privately, among those they trusted, talk was more honest. It was a dual existence that many were comfortable with.

Alternatively, there is the view that there was more non-conformity than originally thought, with many protests being suppressed, particularly after the 1968 Prague Spring. The state wished to present its citizens as docile. It hid figures that suggested social problems; for example, the publication of suicide rates was banned. SED propaganda and the Stasi's aggressive infiltration permeated every level. It was not uncommon for relatives to inform on each other. The apparent retreat into niche life may well have been a method of rejecting the state rather than accepting its domination.

It is challenging to arrive at an exact answer. Obviously a society is made up of individuals, each with their own circumstances, and it is possible, indeed probable, to have more than a single motive for actions. It is not easy to measure levels of discontent in a society while it is under one-party rule, while notions of loyalty to the SED and patriotism to the GDR can become muddled, especially when the ruler encourages the belief that they are the same thing.

Conclusion

The sheer scale of the Stasi and the efforts of the SED to control the youth through the FDJ indicate the degree to which the state enforced its views. The population was constrained through a dictatorship's familiar weapons of fear and propaganda. These suggest that the GDR was a nation of indoctrinated and suppressed citizens that produced an obedient people, at least throughout the 1960s and 1970s. While the extent of SED reach should not be underestimated, it does not necessarily mean that its citizens were a subservient people. To begin with, many East Germans, while resenting the mistrust the state placed in the people, admired their health service, low food prices and full employment. There was pride in the GDR, even if it was balanced with acrimony towards the SED. The state may have tried to rule at every level, but it simply did not do it very well. The people of East Germany could live with this as long as there were some tangible benefits.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

Popular support for the GDR

1 What factors led to popular support for the GDR?

2 What factors produced discontent with life in the GDR?

3 Does an obedient population indicate popular support?

4 The number of letters of complaint from citizens received by Honecker rose in the late 1970s. These were complaints about social issues. Does this indicate that popular support for the GDR was declining?

5 Why is it so difficult to gauge accurately the level of popular support for the GDR in the years 1949–85?

WHAT WAS THE ROLE OF THE PROTESTANT CHURCH IN THE GDR?

The Protestant Church's role in the GDR was one that varied considerably across the period. An initially confrontational stance cooled into an uneasy stalemate in the 1960s. The 1970s saw a period of co-existence, before the 1978 Accord offered the real possibility of genuine co-operation. However, it was in this last period that the Church began to foster, or at least tolerate, the beginnings of opposition. It is a picture made more complicated by the ever-present Stasi infiltration, as well as the actions of individuals who often worked for both the SED regime and for the independence of the Christian faith.

Attacks on religious beliefs and practices

At the end of the Second World War, the Soviet zone of occupied Germany had a total population of around 17 million. Of these, around 15 million were Protestant and one million were Catholic. As well as this high proportion of Protestants, the Church had also gained in popularity during the later stages of the Second World War and its immediate aftermath. Although in Marxist-Leninist ideology there was no place for religion in a socialist society, the Soviets did not attack the Church directly during their period of occupation. Church land and possessions, for example, were exempt from both the 1945 land reform and the following year's nationalisation measures. But in 1946, the USSR abolished Church schools and religious education in its zone of occupation.

Within the GDR, the Protestant Church looked strong at the end of the war, as it represented a link with the past and spiritual solace to the upheavals of the last 50 years of wars and dictatorships. The Church had the institutions and organisational structures to flourish, while some members of the Confessional Church, which had opposed the Nazis, had made links with the communists inside the concentration camps of the Third Reich. However, the communists were immediately aware of the ideological battle between the Party and religious faith. The CDU (Christian Democratic Union Party, set up in 1945) was swallowed up as part of the National Front of the GDR and was completely controlled by the SED. The notion of a partnership between Christianity and the SED was quickly discarded, as the SED wished to reduce the role of the Church to purely religious areas.

In Ulbricht's view, communism and Christianity were not just incompatible, they were unable to exist in the same sphere. The state sought to exploit divisions within the Church that related to past links to the Nazi regime, while it saw the Church as a Western institution, which automatically made it an enemy of the SED and the GDR. The discrimination against Protestant youth groups in schools, in 1951, signalled a start to an anti-Church campaign, but it was the introduction of the *Jugendweihe* ceremony that really intensified this.

- The *Jugendweihe*, basically an initiation ritual for a child to enter a Marxist and atheist world as a citizen, brought a furious response from Church leaders, as they correctly believed it was created in direct competition to the Christian confirmation service. Pastors and religious leaders spoke of the need to obey the will of God rather than the commands of men, and even religious leaders who would become loyal communists, such as Pastor Mizenheim (the 'Red Bishop'), spoke out vehemently against it. Ulbricht stood firm and the number of young people taking the *Jugendweihe* increased steadily, from 17.7 percent in 1954–55 to over 90 percent by the late 1960s.

- Ulbricht also ordered the Stasi to increase operations against the Church. The Stasi drew up a list of Church leaders who could be acceptable to the state and those who would not. This set the tone for state–Church relations for the next 30 years. In 1960, Ulbricht softened his rhetoric against the Church. The CDU was used to influence pastors, and the State Secretariat for Church Questions was created in 1960, to co-ordinate the work of the Church, under the control of the SED.

The outrage over the *Jugendweihe* calmed as the Church adapted to the ways of the SED and the GDR, though attendance at Church services dropped steadily throughout the 1960s. By 1964, nearly one-third of East Germans saw themselves as atheists, as the influence of the Church began to wither away. The compromise between state and Church can be seen in the GDR constitution of 1968. It explicitly recognised religious freedoms, a clear concession to the Church, but it also prohibited any all-German organisation, which the Church still was. The message was clear: the state could not tolerate the links with West Germany, and strictly controlled movement between the two. Therefore, in 1969, the GDR churches officially broke away from the umbrella of their West German partners (but still received subsidies from them). Though not all Church leaders agreed, it was clear that if the Church wanted any role within the GDR, it would have to incorporate itself within the socialist sphere of the SED.

Education and Protestant youth groups

One area that saw particular antagonism between the Church and the SED was the role of the Church in education. The 1954 storm over the *Jugendweihe* ceremony was preceded by arguments over the religious curriculum in schools. In its attempt to gain political control of the youth of East Germany, the SED saw the youth wing of the Protestant Church as a potential threat. The *Junge Gemeinden* (Young Congregation) of the Protestant Church was seen as a counter to the communist ideals of the youth groups set up by the SED. The popularity of the *Junge Gemeinden*, particularly in rural areas, led the SED to accuse the Protestant Church of undermining the work of the FDJ. In 1952, the state outlawed the work of student pastors to prevent the influence of what were considered hostile activities.

In 1953, there was a concerted propaganda offensive against the *Junge Gemeinden*, and the organisation, its writings and badges were banned. The SED used propaganda to turn the public, especially parents, against the group. The FDJ staged demonstrations at universities to call for the dismissal of young Christians. They were primarily accused of espionage and were supposedly inspired by Western imperialist forces. All members of the *Junge Gemeinden* were also accused of being members of a West German terrorist organisation known as the BDJ (an anti-communist youth association in West Germany). A series of show trials were planned to demonstrate their guilt; however, a lack of evidence meant that these did not go ahead. Nonetheless, the persecution of young Christians led to them being expelled from schools and even imprisoned, such as happened to Johannes Hamel, the student pastor at the Martin Luther University at Halle.

Legislation against the *Junge Gemeinden* was overturned following the June 1953 uprising. The SED, under guidance from the youth leader Honecker, realised that a change of tactics would be required to diffuse opposition more effectively. The best way to undermine the hold of *Junge Gemeinden* would be to make the FDJ more attractive to the young. However, many young Christians remained alienated from the SED, resulting in a number fleeing to the West during the mid- to late-1950s, to escape persecution and to gain religious freedom.

Though the storm between Church and state over the youth groups had dissipated by the 1960s, the episode illustrates the real dilemma within the GDR over the role of the Church. The SED, from the very start, wanted to create a Marxist-Leninist society. Not only did this entail the indoctrination of the young, including at school, but it would also make an atheist society within which the Church would have no presence. In a Christian country, with both Protestant and Catholic populations, this could cause too much conflict for a system already shaken by the 1953 uprising. A socialist country, with the Church clearly subservient to the state, would be more acceptable to the SED, at least in a temporary sense.

The establishment of a dialogue between Church and state

After the 1969 Church split from the West, and with the new climate of *Ostpolitik,* the circumstances were right for the relationship between Church and state to move forward. The increased emphasis on social policy by Honecker meant there were some areas that the Church and state could work together on, particularly in social care. The Church played an important role in the care of the elderly; it ran more than 50 hospitals; and it built centres for orphans and the mentally ill. For the state, the FRG subsidies for the Church provided some hard currency and helped to restore historically important Church buildings. According to the Reunified Germany's report on GDR history, the Church played a role in gaining the GDR its United Nations membership in 1973. The mid-1970s was a period of relative peace, with a functional relationship between Church and state. There were new generations of Church leaders who were more open to the idea of a permanent GDR under SED leadership. This was a situation that the rest of the world had also accepted, so it would be easier for the Church to follow suit. Honecker's signing of Basket Three of the Helsinki Accords in 1975 seemed proof of the new cordiality. On paper, this allowed freedom of travel and the promise of human rights, though the SED largely ignored these aspects.

There were still flashes of discord. In August 1976, Pastor Oskar Brüsewitz committed suicide by publicly setting himself on fire, in protest that the rapport between Church and state disguised a fundamental conflict between God and Marx. On a local level, individual pastors and Church groups worked with people who fell outside the Marxist vision of society, such as drug addicts, alcoholics and homosexuals. Sometimes this occurred much to the anguish of the Church's leadership, but the SED could see the value of the Church being a safety net for these sections of society. Honecker could see that negotiation rather than confrontation worked more effectively, and this led directly to the March 1978 accord.

- The accord, or concordat, was the first meeting for over 20 years between the leaders of Church and state. It recognised the need to work together and granted concessions to the Church. These included the building of new churches, access to state radio and television stations, and access to ecclesiastical publications from the West.
- In return, the leadership of the Church acknowledged that their role was within, not alongside, the state and, by implication, the SED.

The SED hoped that the Church would prove to be a useful ally in its negotiations with the West, especially as, in 1978, the diplomacy of détente was being replaced by a more aggressive NATO-led stance. Linked to this new international tension, the SED was about to announce compulsory military instruction classes in schools for all 15- and 16-year-olds, a policy it knew the Church would be against. The SED hoped the accord would offset some of the objections. However, Honecker was taking no chances, and, within a month, he ordered Mielke to step up its subversion of the negative elements within the Church. It was always an inalienable aim of the SED that the Church should eventually be eliminated from society. Though this was still impractical, by 1978 the Stasi felt it could try to reduce its independence, and therefore eagerly placed agents within the leadership of the Church organisation. Using the usual mixture of implied threats, bribes and blackmail, the Stasi persuaded many Church leaders that they were acting in the best interests of the Church. Many IMs within the Church believed that, by informing on those elements whose foolhardiness could cause outright conflict with the SED, they were prolonging and strengthening the Church in the long-term.

The SED, paying lip service to the Helsinki Accords, had cautiously agreed to political discussions within the confines of the Church groups. These were usually on single-issue topics, like the environment, or peace issues, and were held after a religious service. By containing these groups strictly within the naves of the Church, the SED hoped for two advantages. First, the Church would self-police any real dissent to avoid confrontation with the authorities. Secondly, the Stasi could filter down further through the Church levels to begin to root out and decompose this new potential threat.

SOURCE 9 The newspaper of the SED, *Neues Deutschland*, reports on the accord between state and Church, 7 March 1978. The headline was 'Constructive and frank conversation with the Chairman of the Council of State'.

> The Chairman of the Council of State [Honecker] and the leaders of the Evangelical churches discussed questions of common interest in a constructive and frank dialogue.
>
> Erich Honecker explained the policy on peace, security and relaxation of the GDR. Accordingly, the GDR was anxious to reinforce its brotherly solidarity with the Soviet Union and other socialist States, to contribute to the solution of international problems constructively, with special importance attached to achieving the Helsinki Final Act as a whole.
>
> Erich Honecker recognised the Church's record on their commitment to the preservation of peace, in particular, the importance of the contribution of the Churches to the ending of the arms race...
>
> The Chairman of the Council of State expressed his appreciation for the humanitarian aid of the Churches in the GDR...
>
> The Chairman of the Council of State stated that the freedom of worship and of clear separation of Church and state is constitutionally guaranteed and ensured in practice. Honecker stated 'We have very much an understanding.'
>
> ... Bishop Schönherr, representing the Conference of Evangelical Church leaders in East Germany, declared 'it is a matter for both sides that we take responsibility for the same world and the same people... Because you cannot divide the people, such encounters between Church and state are not only useful but essential.'
>
> Bishop Schönherr called on the Church to find a way in the Socialist Society to look for the best for everyone and for the whole Church in socialism.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

The March accord between Church and state

How much value can the historian attach to Source 9 as evidence of the relationship between Church and state in 1978?

Conclusion

Despite the early crises over the discrimination against the *Junge Gemeinden* and then the atheistic *Jugendweihe* ceremony, the Church had managed to successfully navigate through dangerous waters to arrive at a situation where Church and state could exist and even work together. The 1978 accord harmonised relations at a national level and there were areas, both internationally and domestically, where both strove for the same goal. However, tensions remained. The imposition of military training in schools caused resentment in the Church, and even helped to spark the first peace groups that began to question state policy. The self-immolation of Pastor Brüsewitz was repeated in September 1978 by Pastor Rolf Günther. Yet these were small and spontaneous local cases. Overall, the Church was loyal, unsurprising considering the extent of Stasi influence. It was a genuine achievement for the Church to survive in the GDR, a state based on the ideology of Marxism-Leninism, and with dwindling numbers of the faithful.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

The SED and religion

To what extent did the Protestant Church offer effective opposition to the East German government between 1949 and 1985?

HOW FAR DID WESTERN INFLUENCES HAVE AN IMPACT ON LIFE IN THE GDR?

The Berlin Wall may have prevented the mass exodus of East Germans to the West, but it did not stop Western influences travelling in the other direction. After 1961, the spread of these influences into the GDR increased due to the gradual lifting of travel restrictions between East and West that developed under *Ostpolitik*. Even though the movement of people remained severely restricted, ideas and consumer goods were more able to cross the border. Despite searches by border guards, grandparents were able to bring back souvenirs from the West, and, despite the interception of post and parcels from the West, Western consumer goods often made it to families in the East. The role of Western radio and television, beamed into the GDR, did much to make the population of the GDR aware of the latest music and fashion trends, as well as giving them a different version of the news. The impact of these influences was mixed. It is tempting to see them as encouraging people to flee the GDR for a more materialistic life in the West, where standards of living and personal freedoms were greater. This was certainly the fear of many in the government. However, by the late 1970s, Honecker recognised that turning a blind eye to Western influences could act as a useful safety valve for a population that was often dissatisfied with the failure of their own government to meet their needs.

THINKING HISTORICALLY Cause and consequence (5b)

Causation relativity

Historical events usually have many causes. Some are crucial, while some are less important. For some historical questions, it is important to understand exactly what role certain factors played in causing historical change.

Significant factors in the establishment of a dialogue between the Protestant Church and the state from 1975:

Ostpolitik developed in the 1970s.	The Protestant Church in the GDR retained links with that in the FRG after 1949 and received financial donations from Western counterparts in hard currency.
The Helsinki Accords on human rights were signed.	The Protestant Church had a long history of submitting to political authorities going back to the 16th century.
The increasing use of Stasi infiltration and surveillance methods in the 1970s.	Honecker wanted to use the Church to promote socialism.
From the 1960s, the Protestant Church provided a considerable amount of social care by running hospitals, orphanages and homes for the disabled and elderly.	From the 1950s, membership of the Protestant Church declined.

Answer the following questions on your own.

The timing of the establishment of a dialogue between the Protestant Church and the state:

1 How important was *Ostpolitik* in explaining the timing of the dialogue?

2 In what ways did the Helsinki Accords change the state of affairs caused by *Ostpolitik*? How far did this speed up the establishment of a dialogue between the Protestant Church and the state?

3 How might Honecker have delayed the kind of reform contained in the dialogue? What might have been the consequences of this?

The nature of the establishment of a dialogue between the Protestant Church and the state:

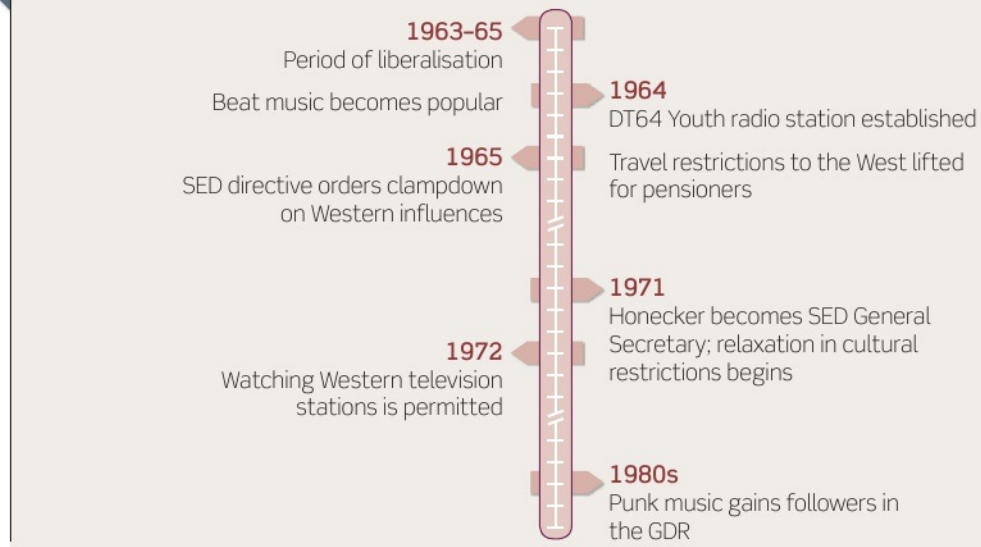
4 How far had the creation of the GDR in 1949 affected the attitudes of the people who were involved in establishing the dialogue?

5 What role did the above factors play in the way that the dialogue developed and the agreements it made?

6 Would the nature of the dialogue have been the same if the membership of the Protestant Church had not been declining?

7 What roles did each of the above causal factors play in determining the nature and timing of the dialogue between Church and state?

TIMELINE OF WESTERN INFLUENCES ON THE GDR



The impact of *Ostpolitik* on travel between the two German states

Willy Brandt, the architect of *Ostpolitik*, had begun the process of pushing to reduce travel restrictions while he was Mayor of West Berlin in the 1960s. Since 1964, East German pensioners had been allowed to visit West Berlin, and the West Germans were allowed East for up to 30 days a year. When Brandt was elected chancellor of the FRG in 1969, the policy of *Ostpolitik* was expanded at the national level. This continued for the next 20 years, despite changes in the FRG leadership.

SOURCE 10 Oliver Fritz is describing the typical trips his father, a furniture installer from East Berlin, would undertake to West Germany in the early 1980s. Taken from his book, *The Iron Curtain Kid* (2009).

Normally, six to ten colleagues from the East worked together in the West, alongside local employees. Mostly the work involved kitting out hotels with furniture, but there were other jobs too. For example, revamping the offices of a West German newspaper or fitting a millionaire's house with wardrobes and cabinets. The owner seemed to have close dealings with the DDR [GDR], as nearly everything within the house came from the East. Even the fence was of communist origin, made of East German railways sleepers. It was easy to see why this guy was a millionaire – with summer temperatures hovering around the 30-degree mark, Dad and his colleagues were not offered any water, let alone a cup of tea or coffee, in the week they worked there...

Not everyone who Dad met in the West was so stingy. Some hotel owners did not charge the workers for meals, others gave them free access to their carpools. One morning, while staying and working in a hotel at the West German seaside, Dad and his colleagues found a small DDR flag standing on their breakfast table – it was 7 October, East Germany's National Holiday. For the evening, hotel staff had organised a skittles competition: the Federal Republic of Germany against the German Democratic Republic. The DDR came out victorious and the prize – bottles of champagne, wine and beer – was shared with the other side.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

Travel to the FRG

1 How valuable is Source 10 as evidence of differences between East and West Germans during the early 1980s?

2 What might explain these differences?

3 Why do you think Oliver Fritz's father did not take the opportunity to stay in the West?

East to West travel

For East German citizens, gaining the right permits and passports to travel to the FRG was not easy. For diplomatic meetings and sports competitors it was possible, but there were harsh restrictions on what was allowed. They were monitored by Stasi agents, and therefore their impact back in the East was limited. Other, potentially problematic, citizens with access to state information were completely banned, as they were labelled 'secret-carriers'. These included SED officials, army officers and scientists. While emergency access for a single individual could be granted, the most common and important in terms of their influence were workers permitted to travel to the FRG for business.

The workers needed to be carefully vetted by the Stasi and were always over 26 and married. The family left behind would therefore give them the incentive to return. If these conditions were met, then the worker was given *Reisekader* (travel cadre) status, allowing them to travel to the West. Typically, these were skilled workers whom the FRG could employ at significantly less cost than their West German equivalents (see Source 10).

These work trips provided opportunities to gain Western currency and goods to bring back to the East. The large variety of clothes and foodstuffs were eagerly consumed in the East – for many, this was their only access to new flavours like kiwi fruit, pineapple and bananas. These workers could make several trips a year, of up to six weeks at a time, and were not accompanied by a guard or member of the security forces. However, they were expected to write a *Reisebericht* (travel report) for the security forces upon their return, to explain every detail of their trip and, in particular, any West German military personnel seen. Most workers filled these out with positive and generic phrases to complete this duty as quickly as possible.

The impact of these trips was twofold. First, there were the consumer products and currency that the state may have felt helped to keep the East German population content. The right to travel, which needed an unblemished and loyal career, was a privilege that most people desperately wanted and would strive for. The goods were not confiscated upon their return and no restrictions were placed on the workers while in the West. This suggests that the state saw more benefits than harm in the exposure to capitalist market forces. Ironically, some of the best-quality goods available in the FRG were made in the GDR, but only for export.

Also, there was a deeper and, potentially for the regime, more dangerous psychological outcome. Contact between the two states was a constant reminder that Germany, and especially Berlin, was a divided entity. East Berlin maps portrayed West Berlin as a blank space, with maybe just a few roads and rivers. The Wall marked the start of this desert, even though the bustling modern city could be clearly seen from windows of the East's *Plattenbau* tower blocks. Many East Germans were surprised when they travelled between East and West and discovered just how similar, just how German, the West was. It was clear that *Ostpolitik* for the FRG was achieving its long-term goals, in reminding the East that it was part of a divided Germany, not an independent country. As travel restrictions were eased in the mid-1980s, this realisation grew.

West to East travel

For West Germans visiting the East, the impact was less significant. Goods were brought in, but security checks were much tighter, and throughout the 1970s and early 1980s, the SED introduced higher currency exchange qualifications, which reduced the numbers travelling East. These usually followed a particular rise in international tension, such as NATO's announcement of the deployment of nuclear missiles in the FRG in 1983, which led to a steep rise in the amount of money to be exchanged. When dealing with Western businesses in meetings in the East, goods were frequently handed over as a show of goodwill, but anything other than basic stationery had to be given to management, to discourage corruption. Once passed on, these client gifts seldom reappeared.

It was the East Germans travelling to the West and then returning home that helped to show the opportunities available. But for many, particularly the young or individuals that the state did not trust, the only way to experience the West was by accessing Western media.

The influence of television, films and popular music

Western influences came in many forms, but popular music, television and films were the main way in which East Germans found out about life in the West. The Berlin Wall did nothing to stop Western

radio stations and television channels from transmitting their signals across most of the GDR. West Berlin provided a useful location from which to beam signals into the GDR, greatly increasing the range of the area that could be reached.

Television

By the 1970s, access to Western music was made easier by the mass production of televisions, and Western stations could be picked up by fiddling with the aerial. Watching Western television had been strictly forbidden in the 1960s, but those East Germans with televisions often broke the law unnoticed. As televisions became common household goods in the 1970s, the practice of watching Western stations became widespread, and it was legally allowed after 1972. West German programmes such as *Beat-Club*, which showed Western pop groups, were especially popular.

The government occasionally made attempts to limit Western influences, but their impact was often minimal. The FDJ was used to launch periodic campaigns against listening to Western broadcasts. These initiatives were termed 'Lightning against NATO transmitters', and involved reporting those people whose aerials pointed towards the West. Many East Germans were able to avoid detection by using indoor aerials.

Films

Films were another way for Western influences to get into the GDR. The East German television station had a limited budget for purchasing rights to show Western films, and as a result, Western films on television were often shown several years after their release in the West. A similar pattern existed for cinema releases. Nonetheless, by the early 1980s, many Hollywood blockbusters were distributed in the GDR. Cinema audiences were overwhelmingly made up of young people (70 percent in the early 1980s), and films made in the West were by far the most popular. *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, *ET* and *Fame* were popular with East German audiences. James Bond films were banned by the GDR, on the grounds that they glorified Western spies, but they were a personal favourite of Honecker, who watched them on videos bought for him in West Berlin by the Stasi.

Popular music

It was through popular music that Western influences made their most outwardly obvious impact. Here, radio, television and magazines worked alongside each other to provide access to new musical trends in the West and their associated fashions. Western radio stations, such as Radio Luxembourg, transmitted across much of the GDR, as did NATO's own radio stations and RIAS, an American station broadcasting from West Berlin. In the 1960s, these broadcasts included British groups, such as the Beatles and the Rolling Stones. A pop radio station, DT64, was established in 1964 by the GDR in order to cater for interest in Western popular music, but the amount of Western music that could be played was limited by government regulations to no more than 40 percent of all music played. The music from Western broadcasts was often recorded on homemade equipment or, by the 1970s, cassette players, and was widely distributed. Licences for live-music groups were taken away if the group persisted in playing Western songs. This measure was difficult to enforce on **underground groups**, and therefore it tended to be ignored. The government also encouraged young people to make pledges in public that they would not listen to music from the West. Many made the pledge, but did not change their behaviour in private.

Despite these restrictions, Western popular music became very fashionable with East German youth. The West German magazine *Bravo*, which was linked to the **Beat music** craze, was popular in the 1960s. Images of Western fashions linked to musical trends encouraged East German youth to copy the latest fads. One fashion that became popular in the 1960s was long hair for young males, a style referred to as 'the mushroom head'. East German mothers and sisters were often set to work adapting clothes mass-produced in the East so that they copied the appearance of those in the more fashionable West.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, disco became a popular craze, as did **punk**. The fashions were copied by young East Germans, and it was common to see punks with Mohican hairstyles gathered around the fountain in the middle of East Berlin's main shopping centre, Alexanderplatz. Compared with the popular music produced by approved artists within the GDR, Western musical styles were often viewed as exciting, even dangerous.

KEY TERMS

Underground group
Live-music act that performed without official permission, often arranged at the last minute to avoid the authorities preventing the performance.

Beat music
A style of rock 'n' roll music that emerged from Britain in the early 1960s. The Beatles was the most famous group producing this type of music.

Punk
A style of rock music that emerged in Britain and the USA during the 1970s. It was associated with attacks on authority. Punks wore safety pins through their noses and mouths and often shaved their heads into a Mohican hairstyle.

SOURCE 11 In the 1980s, punks became a common sight in East Berlin. These two are outside the Kosmos cinema on Karl-Marx Allee.



ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

Punks in the GDR

Look at Source 11.

1 Why was the government worried about young people adopting the fashions of punk?

2 Do you think the government had good cause to be worried?

Impact

The impact of these influences on the population varied depending on age and personality, and also location. The far south-east of the GDR, around the city of Dresden, was one of the few areas of the country that was unable to receive Western radio and television stations. Other East Germans often referred to it as 'the valley of the clueless'.

- While most young people listened to Western music, it was its influence on a particular group of young people that gave the authorities concern. Western music, and its associated fashions, were often used by disillusioned youths as a form of rebellion against the state. It represented a way in which some young people could show their unwillingness to conform to the narrow expectations of the East German government. Thus, growing their hair long indicated their resistance to conformity and the authorities. From the Teddy boys of the 1960s to the punks of the 1980s, musical fashion was a symbol of young people rejecting the values of the GDR. The group most likely to be influenced by these trends was young working-class males, especially those who had just left school with poor qualifications and had become apprentices. The harsh realities of working life created a sense of disillusionment that was fed by images of a better life and greater freedom in the West.
- The number of young people who became Beat boys or punks was small, but the GDR authorities tended to view all youth with suspicion, and were often nervous in their dealings with young people who showed outward signs of non-conformity. The impact of Western influences, they believed, had the potential to affect the social stability of the GDR. This view reflected a degree of paranoia on the part of the government, but there were occasions when their fears were realised. In 1965, a gathering of 2,500 Beat music fans in Leipzig protested about restrictions on Beat groups performing in the city. The authorities' nervousness was illustrated by the fact that over 1,500 of the 'protestors' were actually police informers. This was just one of many demonstrations that took place at this time.
- Western influences promoted the development of small gangs of non-conformist youths. They were common in most of the cities of the GDR. In Leipzig, the Capitol gang was notorious. They often congregated outside the local Capitol cinema and openly listened to Western radio broadcasts to provoke the local police.
- For most young people, listening to Western music or adopting the latest fashions of the West was not an overtly political act. Most young people wanted greater freedom of individual expression rather than the removal of the SED or an end to the GDR. Nonetheless, these influences fed into a growing disillusionment that produced increasing numbers of 'border assailants' (*Grenzverletzer*). Young, single men made up the majority of those seeking to flee the GDR. However, Western influences were often only one factor in the decision to try to leave the country. The activities of the authorities, such as constant surveillance by the Stasi, restrictions on freedom and the blocking of job opportunities, were also key factors, and for those with family responsibilities, they could be more decisive than images of a fantasy world in the West.
- Most young people conformed to the wishes of the regime, at least in public. The regime had plenty of methods that they could use to indoctrinate the population with socialist values. The education system, the FDJ and the system of using loyalty to the Party as a gateway to university and good jobs ensured that the impact of Western influences remained limited and that most people outwardly conformed. The introduction of military conscription in 1962 proved a valuable tool for the SED to maintain its ideological influence over young males. It should be no surprise that, in this situation, the impact of Western influences remained limited and often superficial.
- The attitude of the government to the impact of Western influences changed through the period. In 1965, the Central Committee of the SED issued a directive that brought in new controls and punishments to stem the tide of Western influences. In the Prenzlauer Berg district of East Berlin, SED officials complained that youth clubs seemed to be full of teenagers whose only interest was dancing to Western music and getting drunk. The East German authorities started to put Beat boys into custody, shave their heads in the style of a soldier and exchange their clothes for practical overalls. The role of the FDJ in disciplining wayward youth and trying

to instil good socialist values was increased. Although the government developed a sense of paranoia about the damaging effects of exposure to the West, it recognised that Western influences could not be prevented. Instead, it tried to restrict and control access. To the SED, the temporary escape to the West through visits and media was preferable to any attempt of permanent escape over the Wall.

- For the older generation, less concerned with youth music and fashions, their main interest was in listening to or watching West German news coverage. This was a useful counterbalance to the propaganda put out by East German news.
- Hollywood blockbusters may have provided an exciting outlet for young people, but the needs of a more thoughtful audience were better catered for by the GDR's own film studios. Based on the outskirts of Potsdam, DEFA studios at Babelsberg produced 'artistic' films of genuine quality, alongside propaganda.

SOURCE 12 A report by the GDR's Central Institute for Research into Youth, issued in 1979.

It took the authority of the Party and its General Secretary to make it clear that the length of hair and the tightness of trousers are not sufficient indicators of political attitude and societal involvement.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

Government attitudes to Western influences

Look at Source 12. Do you think the Party's view of Western influences was correct? Explain your answer.

The government had good grounds for viewing Western influences with suspicion, as agents of capitalism designed to undermine the socialist state. These influences often added to a growing scepticism of the SED's claims of its economic achievements and political successes. Thus, while Western influences were not a serious threat to the regime, they gradually eroded the authority of the SED.

AS Level Exam-Style Question Section B

How far did Western influences have an impact on the GDR between 1961 and 1985? (20 marks)

Tip

Make sure you focus on the 'impact' of Western influences rather than just describing them. You should come to a reasoned and supported judgement on the degree to which Western influences had an impact.

Conclusion

The 1950s and 1960s witnessed the consolidation of power of the SED; and the crises of the 1953 uprising and the 1961 Berlin Wall had tested the ability of the state to control the population. The state dealt with these pressures with the all-too-familiar tools of propaganda and fear. Then, throughout the 1970s, with Honecker's social contract and the policy of *Ostpolitik* between the GDR and the FRG, life established a fairly stable routine. In many respects, the average life for the average citizen of East Germany was a normal mix of family and work. The sinister apparatus of the Stasi was in place and the state media produced a steady stream of propaganda, but on a daily level, these could largely be filtered out by the majority of people.

There was a duality about their lives, where an outward appearance of loyalty gained them the benefits of the social welfare programmes that were often as good as anything in the West. Once loyalty had been shown, the average person could retreat into a more relaxed private world, the so-called niche society. Whether this retreat was an attempt to reject, ignore or accept the totalitarian aspects of the SED was more of an individual choice. The importance is that there were always two pressures on each person. First, to openly conform to state control, and secondly, to then carry on and live their life. These two forces did not always exert pressure in the same direction. The role of the Protestant Church is a good example of this: working within the socialist state, while at the same time striving to maintain its independence.

As the 1970s progressed, the amount of Western influence upon private lives grew and, for some of the population, it was getting harder to live in this dual existence. The Western media showed East Germans an alternative at a time when they were becoming more concerned about the stagnation of the state around them.

EXTEND YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Films about life in the GDR

Since reunification there have been a number of films that have explored issues concerned with life in East Germany. The following are particularly useful:

- *Goodbye Lenin* (dir. Wolfgang Becker, 2002), a comedy that explores responses to the end of the GDR.
- *The Lives of Others* (dir. Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck, 2006), a drama that deals with the impact of the Stasi on the lives of citizens and Stasi members.
- *Barbara* (dir. Christian Petzold, 2012), a thought-provoking drama about the dilemmas facing those who wished to flee to the West.

ACTIVITY
SUMMARY

The GDR's control over its population

1 What evidence is there to support the view that, by the mid-1970s, there was genuine popular support for the GDR?

2 What evidence is there to support the view that the GDR government relied on repressive measures to maintain control of the population?

WIDER READING

Bushnell, N. and Leonard, A. *Germany Divided and Reunited 1945–91*, Hodder Education (2009)

Dennis, M. *The Stasi: Myth and Reality*, Routledge (2003)

Fulbrook, M. *Anatomy of a Dictatorship: Inside the GDR 1949–1989*, OUP (1995)

Fulbrook, M. *Dissonant Lives: Generations and Violence through the German Dictatorships*, OUP (2011)

Fulbrook, M. *The People's State: East German Society from Hitler to Honecker*, Yale University Press (2005)

Funder, A. *Stasiland: Stories from Behind the Berlin Wall*, Granta Books (2003)

Palmowski, J. *Inventing a Socialist Nation: Heimat and the Politics of Everyday Life in the GDR 1945–1990*, CUP (2009)

Ross, C. *The East German Dictatorship*, Bloomsbury Academic (2002)

Waller, S. *From Defeat to Unity: Germany 1945–91*, Nelson Thornes (2009)

2b.4 Growing crises and the collapse of communist rule in the GDR, 1985–90

KEY QUESTIONS

- Why were the economic problems of the GDR so severe by the late 1980s?
- How significant was Gorbachev's refusal to continue to support the GDR?
- How did events in 1989 lead to such a sudden opening of the Berlin Wall?
- Why was the reunification of the GDR and the FRG so rapid?

INTRODUCTION

The opening of the Berlin Wall by the ruling SED Party in November 1989 took the world by surprise. Less than a year earlier, in January 1989, Honecker had boldly asserted that the Berlin Wall would still exist in 100 years' time. Nobody inside or outside the German Democratic Republic (GDR) would have confidently challenged this claim. A seemingly strong government by dictatorship that many regarded as indestructible suddenly collapsed. Over the next 11 months, the communist GDR became part of an enlarged, capitalist Federal Republic of Germany (FRG).

Was the collapse of communist rule in the GDR inevitable? In many ways, the very sudden nature of the collapse of SED control makes the reasons for its decline seem more obvious. Gorbachev's role was undoubtedly very significant. Gorbachev had become leader of the USSR in 1985, and his determination to bring about significant reform in the USSR's domestic and foreign policies had significant repercussions for the GDR. This, together with the GDR's increasingly severe economic problems and popular demands for reform, combined to bring about the opening of the border between the GDR and the FRG in November 1989.

However, the opening of the border did not necessarily mean that the collapse of the GDR was inevitable and that the reunification of the GDR and the FRG was a foregone conclusion. Popular protest within the GDR, with slogans on banners such as 'We are staying here', and attempts at forming a more democratically styled government, showed that many wanted to maintain a separate German nation that was distinct from the FRG. However, it soon became impossible to maintain or even justify a German nation separate from the FRG. FRG Chancellor Kohl's promises of rapid prosperity for East Germans, and the willingness of US and Soviet leaders to accept a reunited Germany, ensured that the recently opened Berlin Wall fell completely. By October 1990, a newly enlarged FRG had incorporated the territory of the former GDR, and a united Germany began a new era in European and global politics.

1985 – Gorbachev becomes leader of the USSR

1987 – Honecker becomes the first leader of the GDR to visit the FRG

Stasi raid on the Environmental Library in East Berlin

1985 | 1986 | 1987 | 1988

SOURCE 1 On 4 November 1989, an estimated one million people demonstrated in East Berlin for reforms. The slogan 'Wir bleiben hier' means 'We are staying here', making it clear that, at this stage, many were protesting for domestic reforms rather than for reunification with the FRG.



WHY WERE THE ECONOMIC PROBLEMS OF THE GDR SO SEVERE BY THE LATE 1980S?

The GDR's unique position between the Soviet Union and the FRG helped to isolate it from many of the economic problems that other Eastern European countries had been suffering from. However, this could not go on indefinitely. Economic growth was grinding to a halt during the 1980s, while the national debt and a lack of currency severely restricted the GDR's capacity to adapt to new technologies. Strains on the health and welfare system not only required additional expenditure, but were harming the GDR's status as a socialist system able to benefit the people. This general decline in the economy was mirrored by a similar decline in living standards. Consumer goods were increasingly hard to get hold of, while closer contacts with West Germany highlighted the falling standards even more in the eyes of the people. As the GDR tried vainly to recover and restore its economy, it became more dependent on West Germany. The danger for the GDR was that, if the people began to see the West German economy as stronger and more efficient, then they might also draw the same conclusion about the West German political system.



1989 – Hungary opens its border with Austria
New Forum founded
Monday demonstrations against the GDR government begin in Nikolai Church in Leipzig

October 1989 – Gorbachev visits East Berlin for the GDR's 40th anniversary celebrations
Honecker replaced by Krenz as General Secretary of the SED

November 1989 – The border between East and West Berlin is opened at several points along the Berlin Wall
FRG Chancellor Kohl announces his 'Ten-Point Plan'
SED renounces its claim to leadership
Round Table talks begin

March 1990 – Elections held in the GDR
July 1990 – Currency union between the GDR and the FRG

September 1990 – The Two-Plus-Four Treaty is signed
October 1990 – The GDR and FRG are formally united

1989 1990

The economy in the 1980s

The SED's propaganda emphasised that GDR citizens, by the 1980s, enjoyed the security of full employment; non-existent homelessness; very cheap rents; heavily subsidised essential food items; and public transport costs that had remained virtually unchanged since the GDR's very foundation. This was accurate in some ways, such as inexpensive travel costs within the GDR, but it was also somewhat distorted. Full employment meant that, in some industries and services, there was overstaffing. Citizens seen as politically unreliable may not have had the employment opportunities of their choice, and a lack of new housing meant that many lived in overcrowded accommodation, which they arrived at in their overcrowded public transport. Food might be readily available, but the queues for it were often long, and luxuries were increasingly rare.

By the mid-1980s, the GDR's economy was facing slower industrial growth, which resulted in falling income for the government. Economic growth between 1982 and 1985 had slowed to 1.5 percent, from a previous two percent between 1976 and 1980. Honecker could only respond with a range of short-term measures that only served to exacerbate the situation in the medium- and longer-term. Measures that were hastily implemented included reductions in public spending, the selling of around 1,500 political prisoners each year to the FRG, and loans from the FRG – the scale of which was often kept hidden from the majority of the Politburo. Goods were taken out of the domestic market to boost exports, which then increased shortages of consumer items within the GDR. This was particularly disheartening for many within East Germany, as they had often amassed considerable savings that were simply the result of not having goods on which they could spend their money.

The Five-Year Plan of 1986–90 attempted to address these issues by acknowledging some of the internal weaknesses, such as the housing shortage. Its guidelines aimed at the construction, or modernisation, of over a million homes. It also encouraged a focus on new technologies, such as the production of microchips, though the ability of East Germany (with a population of around 16 million) to compete with the vast resources of the Western world was perhaps unrealistic. The achievements of this Plan were overtaken by the events of 1989–90, but the good intentions did little to improve the quality of items produced in relation to their quantity, and the country failed to close the gap on the steadily progressing economy of West Germany, especially in the application of technology.

The economy was also significantly hampered by the high levels of expenditure on defence, which was taking up nearly eight percent of government spending. It is estimated that, by the 1980s, the expenditure on maintaining, modifying and guarding the Berlin Wall alone was sufficient to pay for all of the GDR's gas and electricity bills, and would have allowed the implementation of a 35-hour working week. By the late 1980s, the 91,000 full-time employees of the Stasi placed an additional financial strain on the weakening economy. They are estimated to have cost DM4 billion each year.

The growing national debt

Debts to Western institutions grew throughout the 1980s to over DM40 billion. Though this amount was not insurmountable for a state with a GDP of around DM250 billion, the lack of exports with which to generate currency meant it was increasingly difficult to pay these debts. The scale of the problem can be seen in the *Schürer-Papier* (a report named after its principal author), prepared for the Politburo in October 1989. It projected a need to increase export surplus by over 500 percent from 1990 to 1995, in order to stabilise debt levels. This would have been a completely unrealistic solution without a complete political and economic restructure.

Indeed, much of this debt had been created by previous efforts to increase exports, which required initial imports of various technologies and resources to kick-start industrial development. Imports, especially of consumer goods, were also used to maintain living standards. In an effort to gain hard currency, East Germany had resold Soviet oil to the West (by 1983, it made up 30 percent of its Western exports), but this had meant using brown coal, a cheaper and more inefficient fuel, for its own domestic and industrial use. This conversion cost a massive amount of internal investment and far outweighed any short-term benefits. The combination of crisis management and growing currency debts added to a sense of domestic instability. New products from the more traditional industries, like machine building and electrical industries, had failed to compete with the higher technological standards in the West. Some of these inferior goods were accepted by the Soviet Union, in effect subsidising the GDR, but exports of heavy industry dropped by approximately 30 percent between 1986 and 1988.

This dire financial situation was not even known by most of the SED leadership, as it was kept hidden by Honecker. He was always sensitive about how he was perceived, and unwilling to face the embarrassment of economic reality becoming public knowledge, even within the SED. This restriction of economic information alarmingly included the GDR's own economics minister, Günter Mittag. However, in itself, this was not sufficient to bring about the collapse of the GDR. Whereas the FRG had ample resources to continue propping up the GDR, East Germany's level of national debt contributed significantly to Gorbachev's decision not to increase financial support for the GDR from the USSR, which had

EXTEND YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Günter Mittag (1926–94)

He was one of the most powerful men in the GDR. Mittag was Secretary for Economic Affairs, and a member of the SED Politburo and the Council of the State. In 1963, along with Erich Apel, he designed the New System for Economic Management and Planning (NOSPL) to modernise and streamline the economy of the GDR. This would only be partly implemented due to political opposition.

His most significant contribution was as Secretary for Economic Affairs from 1976 to 1989, when he implemented state control of the economy. He wanted strict economic controls and pushed for centralisation. In 1983, he arranged for the 'billion loan' from West Germany.

He had both his legs amputated due to illness during the mid-1980s, and lost his position when Honecker was removed.

severe economic problems of its own. With the USSR's refusal to lend to the GDR as a last resort, and the failure of the GDR to maintain export surpluses to pay debts, the economy was approaching terminal decline.

High spending on health and welfare

Although personal incomes and overall standards of living in the GDR compared unfavourably to those in the FRG, in many ways the population had a greater level of security, due to the very high levels of government spending on health and social welfare. Expenditure on subsidised housing, education, health and welfare rose from DM72.9 billion in 1980 to DM112.3 billion in 1985.

Health was an important issue for the GDR. A healthy workforce encouraged productivity, while a leading health-care system gained the GDR not just a humanitarian sense of well-being, but international prestige as well. Some analysts have suggested that a strong welfare system had clear social and political consequences in maintaining a certain public satisfaction with the state, and therefore prevented opposition within the GDR from reaching significant levels of mass protest against SED rule.

By the 1980s, many European health-care systems were experiencing the strains of an ageing population, expensive new technologies and heightened expectations, but East Germany had additional costs because of specific problems. Heavy industry had contaminated its cities, and the resulting environmental damage affected its inhabitants. Air pollution was the worst in Europe, and this caused respiratory problems such as chronic bronchitis. Some towns, such as Bitterfeld, were so polluted by power stations, chemical works and coal mines, that if United Nations criteria had been applied they would have been declared unfit for human habitation. The process of industrialisation had been implemented with scant regard for the health of its workers, while unsafe machinery and working practices caused numerous accidents. This had put further strain on the health-care system. It was a system that had been favourably compared with the West in the 1970s, but it increasingly fell behind during the 1980s.

The health-care system itself remained serviceable, but the inadequate funding and wider economic problems began a spiral into decline. The ill-health of the people reflected the failing economy, the shortfalls of which led to a lack of investment in health and safety, which increased the burden on an ailing health service.

EXTEND YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Under the influence

By 1987, it was estimated that one in eight East Germans suffered from some form of alcoholism. Clearly this would be an extra economic burden on the health-care system, but it also had an economic effect on East Germany's productivity. There was a culture, especially among adult working-class males, of *Sauferei* (constant drinking) in the workplace, usually revolving around the mixing of beer and cheap spirits.

Trade unions, whose leaders were not free from alcohol themselves, confirmed the inflammatory role of alcohol in factory disputes and unofficial strikes. Indeed, some strikes were held over the quality and quantity of the beer available at work!

The poor quality of consumer and other goods

The focus on heavy industry established a trend for the neglect of consumer goods. This neglect had an impact on the availability and quality of consumer goods for the remainder of the existence of the GDR. Attempts had been made to halt this trend, most notably in the 1970s, when Honecker ordered factories that were producing for the industrial sector to ensure five percent of their output was made up of consumer goods. The result was a strange combination of products, such as a steel mill producing microwave ovens, or brown coal-fired power plants making ironing boards. This led to the production of poor-quality goods and subsequent consumer discontent.

Some of the shortfall in goods was made up by the private sector, which grew slightly in 1985 for the first time in many years. Though these private craftsmen had a small impact on the overall economy (just 2.8 percent of net national product), they were important in certain areas. This included the manufacture of spare parts for cars, refrigerators, washing machines and televisions, all of which had become more readily available during the 1980s.

East Germany's population had little difficulty obtaining most essential goods, such as meat, butter, potatoes, bread and basic items of clothing. However, they often had to spend a considerable amount of time shopping for them. People regularly had to hunt for what they required, and often purchased items after queuing for long periods, even if those items were not what they needed. This was because they did not know when the item might become available again. One common example was clothing, with limited numbers of sizes available in the shops. A person might go in to buy shoes, but walk out with a tie, as they could not get what they wanted, but decided to leave with something that would possibly be of use later. There was also a widespread culture of family members, friends and neighbours informally exchanging goods with one another.

Just as bartering became a more common way to complete a small transaction, the unease about the economic ability of the country to meet the needs of its people was reflected in the growth of the second economy. These more illegal activities involved various tips or bribes to get the desired item or service, particularly a product in short supply. These became known as *Bückware*, or duck goods, as they were found below the counter. The economic impact of the 'second economy' may be hard to measure and largely anecdotal, but it did highlight the deficiencies in the East German service sector. Goods had long been scarce and many people had large savings. With cash in hand, the temptation to pay extra to guarantee a sought-after product must have been easy to yield to.

SOURCE 2 Oliver Fritz reminiscing about his childhood and forming the right contacts to get the right products. From *The Iron Curtain Kid* (2009).

> Having the right connections in East Germany meant that you could nearly get everything – provided you could afford to bribe people or repay their favours with other sought-after goods. Anyone else had to rely on family members or friends being in charge of distributing services or goods. Knowing the right people was called 'Vitamin B' – B standing for *Beziehungen*, which means connections, so in English it could have been 'Vitamin C'. One popular saying was: Socialism without connections is like capitalism without money. That sums it up nicely.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

Economic problems in the late 1980s

1 How does Source 2 reflect the growing economic problems in the GDR?

2 How would you describe the tone of this source? What words and phrases would you use as evidence to illustrate this tone?

While essential items could be obtained, that was not always the case for high-quality or less essential items. Fruit and vegetables were more difficult to obtain. Even high-quality goods produced in the GDR, such as cameras, were difficult to obtain within the GDR, as they were produced primarily for export. Although goods were more available than in the neighbouring Eastern bloc states, East Germans had to live with inferior-quality products compared to Western standards. This was a fact of which the population of the GDR was acutely conscious. Access to West German television stations along the borders offered glimpses of Western capitalist lifestyles, including music, cinema and fashion. On one occasion in June 1987, some of the music speakers at a rock festival in West Berlin's Reichstag building were turned towards the East, to allow over 4,000 young East Germans to hear, if not see, the likes of David Bowie and Genesis. The transference of Western culture allowed the sharp contrast in living standards to become apparent, thereby raising the expectations of the potential of a consumer society, and making the failure of socialism to provide improved living standards all too obvious.

A well-known joke of the time illustrates the frustration of living within an economy that often failed to deliver. A customer orders a Trabant car and the salesman tells him to come back to pick it up in nine years' time. The customer immediately asks, 'Shall I come back in the morning or in the evening?' Stunned, the salesman replies, 'You're joking, aren't you?' 'No, not at all,' the customer says. 'It's just that I need to know whether the plumber can come at 3pm or not.' To the East German people it was clear that joke would not work in the West.

Economic relations with West Germany

It was evident that the economic focus of the GDR throughout the 1980s shifted towards the West. By 1989, non-socialist countries made up a majority of both the GDR's exports and imports. The economic relationship between the GDR and the FRG had grown through the 1970s, though it had been predominantly one-way traffic, as the GDR borrowed heavily to finance increasing imports of consumer goods, as well as having to cover very expensive welfare costs.

By 1989, 20 percent of all GDR trade was with West Germany, with whom the GDR had special trade relationships that avoided tariffs and quotas, while providing interest-free credit. Huge charges were made for transit across GDR territory to West Berlin, and West Germany had also bought the freedom of around 34,000 **dissidents**, usually individuals and families who had been caught trying to escape to the West. This had first started in 1963, with a cash payment for the so-called 'enemies of socialism', but it had grown throughout the period, and payment was whatever product was in short supply, ranging from food to diamonds. It is estimated that, through this scheme, West Germany paid up to DM3 billion to the ailing GDR economy.

KEY TERM

Dissident
A person who actively challenged the authority of the SED and was punished by the state, usually by imprisonment.

The economic consequences of inter-German co-operation prolonged the existence of the GDR, as the FRG offered life support, albeit of a limited extent, by managing the levels of debt. However, it also raised the political assumption that perhaps the FRG was not as dangerous as the previous 40 years of ideological propaganda had suggested. This feeling was fostered further after Honecker's visit to West Germany in 1987.

SOURCE 3 An East German report conducted by the local branch of the SED from Frankfurt-an-der-Oder in October 1987, reflecting on Honecker's visit. From M. Fulbrook, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship* (1995).

> The fact cannot be overlooked that among a section of the population of all ages and social classes, there are heightened expectations above all in relation to travel restrictions. This is particularly the case among youngsters, religiously inclined citizens, members of the medical profession and the cultural intelligentsia, as well as tradespeople, artisans, and craftsmen. Such expectations are more or less disassociated from the real situation concerning relations with the FRG and its position with regard to basic questions of the sovereignty and independence of the GDR. Evidence of this is the continuing rise in the number of applications in the third quarter of 1987 for a permanent change of residence to the FRG or Berlin (west), in which connection many individuals express the expectation that it would now be easier to move across to the FRG.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

The impact of improved links with the FRG

1 What does Source 3 suggest was the impact of Honecker's visit to West Germany?

2 The report was produced by local SED officials. How much value can a historian attach to a report such as this?

In conclusion, the GDR, unlike other countries in the Eastern bloc, was able to survive in relative prosperity (though its living standards were roughly half those of its Western counterparts). It could be argued that this enabled the regime to maintain its legitimacy. However, the problems were mounting, and in late 1989, the SED requested a new billion Deutschmark loan from the FRG (though the subsequent political collapse meant the West lost interest in favour of reunification plans). Hard currency debts, falling standards of living, a lack of investment and a labour shortage gave the impression of an economic system grinding to a halt. As the limited prosperity ebbed away, so did the regime's claim to legitimacy. Its unique economic relationship with both the USSR and West Germany may have postponed the call for reform, but it would not prevent it indefinitely. However, the direction that this call would arrive from came as a surprise.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

The economy of the GDR by the late 1980s

1 Make a list of the economic problems facing the GDR in the late 1980s.

2 Rank these problems in order of their seriousness. Justify your decision.

A Level Exam-Style Question Section B

To what extent did economic weaknesses seriously undermine the existence of the GDR after 1985? (20 marks)

Tip

This question requires you to explain the impact of economic weaknesses, so do not just list them. Make sure you assess the seriousness of the roles of the economic weaknesses in undermining the continued existence of the GDR.

HOW SIGNIFICANT WAS GORBACHEV'S REFUSAL TO CONTINUE TO SUPPORT THE GDR?

From the early 1980s onwards, a series of reform movements gradually began to develop in many Eastern bloc states. The initial impetus for reform within communist states began in Poland with the **Solidarity** movement, which then led to increasing dissent in Czechoslovakia. Growing popular demands for political reforms, such as genuine multi-party elections, freedom of speech and the freedom to travel, however, gathered significant impetus when Gorbachev became leader of the USSR in 1985. By the late 1980s, these movements were starting to demand far more radical change than had even been envisaged by Gorbachev.

KEY TERM

Solidarity
The name of a federation of trade unions that emerged in Poland from 1980 onwards. It reached a total membership of nearly ten million workers. It was not controlled by the ruling Communist Party in Poland and became a broad movement that promoted political and social reforms.

The impact of perestroika and glasnost on the GDR's government and people

Gorbachev wanted a radically new direction for the USSR, based on two main ideas - **perestroika** and **glasnost**. For the domestic reforms that Gorbachev envisaged to have any chance of success, it was essential that the USSR's ailing economy improved. The Cold War was a financial drain on the USSR, and, increasingly, Soviet leaders regarded support for the Eastern bloc as an economic burden. By the late 1980s, it was clear that any advantages to the USSR of maintaining a military presence in communist European states were clearly outweighed by the costs. This realisation led to Gorbachev announcing the abandoning of the Brezhnev Doctrine. This radical change in Soviet foreign policy had a profound effect on the GDR government. The SED could no longer count on the USSR's support to intervene if there was any domestic unrest.

KEY TERMS

Perestroika and glasnost
The key concepts underpinning Gorbachev's reform programme for the USSR. Perestroika (restructuring) aimed to bring about radical economic changes, such as allowing private enterprise. Glasnost (openness) was to bring about democratic changes such as freedom of speech, free elections and a system of government that would include the direct participation of non-communist political parties.

The SED government also became very concerned at sudden developments in relations between the USSR and the FRG. During the late 1980s, a series of formal state visits took place between the FRG and the Soviet Union, which included FRG Chancellor Kohl making a formal state visit to Moscow in 1988, and Gorbachev visiting the FRG in 1989.

EXTEND YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Helmut Kohl (1930–present)
He was chancellor of the FRG from 1982 to 1990, and then of the reunited Germany from 1990 to 1998. During the rapid series of events in 1989, he seemed at first determined to slow down the pace of change and prevent large-scale emigration from the GDR to the FRG. However, by November 1989, he promised widespread prosperity for East Germany and used the GDR's March 1990 election results to push for the rapid reunification of the GDR and the FRG.

The impact of Gorbachev's desire for reform left the SED leadership with a conundrum. In essence, the GDR was created as a direct result of Cold War hostility between the superpowers. As an artificial country, it had been more reliant on Soviet support that other communist regimes. Therefore, to undertake a fundamental political restructure of the GDR's system of government would mean departing from communist ideological principles. Such changes would mean that the GDR would not be distinct from the FRG and would, in many ways, take away any justification for its separate existence. On the other hand, failure to reform risked the rise of significant domestic opposition to SED rule.

Initially, the SED tried to use propaganda, maintaining that the GDR's economic superiority within the Eastern bloc made reforms unnecessary, and emphasising that the GDR's constitution did in fact allow the existence of other political parties. This then developed into anti-Soviet propaganda about widespread food shortages and homelessness within the USSR. The GDR government also found itself in the ironic position of having to censor its own people from access to any Soviet media that openly supported Gorbachev's reforms or criticised Honecker. In November 1988, for example, the SED banned the Soviet magazine *Sputnik*, and in a film festival, five Soviet films that portrayed Gorbachev's policies positively were banned. In the same year, an East German teacher was arrested after being informed on by a pupil for using an article from *Pravda*, the official state newspaper of the USSR, which had criticised Honecker. This pushed copies of Gorbachev's speeches onto the black market, where they fetched high prices. Therefore, this censorship proved counterproductive, as East Germans actively sought out the glasnost that the state had denied them.

SOURCE 4

A 1988 article by Günter Herlt, a top official in GDR state television, attempting to explain that the GDR does not have to follow the soviet reforms. It is taken from a GDR monthly for agitators, *WAS und WIE*, under the title, *Transparent 'Advice'*.

> Our party is following developments in all socialist states with great interest. We too see building socialism as a constant process of creative work to solve new challenges. As Erich Honecker said: 'Of course we consider and evaluate the experiences of other socialist nations. But that does not mean we simply copy them. That would be harmful.'

The SED could not succeed in isolating its own people from developments within the USSR and other parts of the Eastern bloc, where some political leaders, as well as the general population, were increasingly questioning communist rule. The reforms of Gorbachev not only introduced measures for economic reconstruction and political openness, they also encouraged a real sense of expectation throughout all East European states. With Honecker and many of the top SED leaders now elderly men, questions were being asked about the succession of power. Some within the SED saw Soviet-style reform as irrelevant to the GDR, as the state was still solid enough to need no renovation. However, the often younger members began to explore the possibility of an East German equivalent to Gorbachev.

In an effort to highlight its independence from the Soviet Union, the leadership had branded itself as a socialist country, but in its own colour distinct from the USSR. Yet the Party was beginning to show divisions over the best way forward. It was a variation between the more hard-line central leadership and the more pro-Gorbachev communists at a regional and local level. The previously united SED was starting to splinter.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

Gorbachev and the GDR

1 What impact did Gorbachev becoming leader of the USSR have on the GDR?

2 To what extent is Source 4 useful as evidence of the attitudes of the Politburo and the SED to Gorbachev's reforms?

The pressure for reform

By the late 1980s, there was not only a growing demand for reform, but it was becoming more organised. Its roots can be seen emerging out of the 1960s, influenced by whispers of Western counter-culture, as well as the brief flowering of liberalisation in Czechoslovakia during the Prague Spring of 1968. But by the 1980s, opposition was being taken up by the GDR Generation, that is, 25- to 40-year-olds who had grown up under the shadow of the Berlin Wall. There was a diverse range of issues that loosely combined to form a distinct alternative political culture. These tended to have a cultural impact rather than a clear political agenda, and favoured grass-roots participation rather than national political reform. Issues like peace, ecological problems, women's rights, Third World issues and gay rights all led to the formation of small autonomous groups, often with tiny, yet motivated and active memberships.

There were some 80–90 ecological groups, often based in the larger cities such as Leipzig, where environmental problems were rife. One such group, based in the basement of a Berlin apartment, set up the Environmental Library in 1986. Its self-printed journal, *Umweltblätter*, enjoyed a circulation of around 2,000 a month. The Stasi, always efficient in its surveillance, raided the premises. Several leading members were arrested and the Stasi seized the printing press. This was not a unique occurrence, and the risk of arrest helped to keep the impact of the self-contained or autonomous groups at a minor level. In January 1988, 100 activists were arrested and deported to West Germany after disrupting an SED rally commemorating the Spartacist Communist Uprising of 1919. The risk was real.

One issue that seemed to gain little favour among the young was the reunification of Germany. This may be because the GDR Generation had no experience of a single Germany and it was seen as too unrealistic. It was obvious that such a direct challenge to the SED would not be tolerated. A more widespread, if abstract, desire was the promotion of peace, which became central to the alternative political culture. The introduction of military training in education and a sharp increase in Cold War tension in the early 1980s helped to fuel an interest in peace campaigns. In 1985, as Gorbachev began his calls for Soviet internal reform, these groups also expanded their message. The Initiative for Peace and Human Rights (IFM), with a small, informal, yet influential membership, began to foster contacts outside the GDR and into the Soviet bloc. It too was targeted by the Stasi, but – as with many of the alternative groups – the IFM did gain some protection from the Protestant Church.

EXTEND YOUR KNOWLEDGE

The far right

Not all groups promoted a democratic or peaceful agenda. In the 1980s, a skinhead culture grew and linked itself to the extremist policies of the far right. This was particularly embarrassing to the GDR, which prided itself on being an anti-fascist state. The usual state repression pushed the movement away from sporadic fights and attempts to celebrate the Nazi past, into the privacy of their apartments, mainly in East Berlin and Potsdam.

There is some evidence to support the claim of the GDR that links with West German far-right groups encouraged the movement, but internal investigations by Church organisations tended to focus on poor education, and a lack of opportunities and identification with the state as more powerful motivations. It can be seen as another reaction to the failure of socialism to improve the lives of its citizens. Stasi records show that, in 1988–89, there were around 1,000 extreme right activists in organised groups in the GDR.

The role of Protestant opposition groups

The Protestant Church in the GDR had always performed a role in providing valuable care and support for groups such as the elderly and the disabled. However, the Church had an important, if somewhat mixed, role in the pressure for reform. It was often an uncomfortable balancing act of society/state/God, and was governed by a wide range of complex and emotional issues that make it difficult to apply a uniform judgement on its role. For the small autonomous groups, it offered a degree of protective cover from the SED. For the SED, the Church was an opportunity to restrict the activities of its more radical members. For the leaders of the Church itself, they merely wanted to survive in a climate where its membership had fallen from 80 percent of the population in 1950 to just 30 percent (five million) by the late 1980s.

The 1978 accord between Honecker and the Protestant leadership saw the acceptance of a 'Church within socialism', and the leaders of both sides hoped for a working relationship. Any political elements within the Church's membership could be contained within the sphere of the Church rather than given a wider public stage. Meanwhile, the Church was the only major organisation allowed outside the SED with significant control of its own affairs. But the accord had also unwittingly provided a forum for individuals wanting to discuss reform.

This relationship was uneasy from the start. Many within the SED resented the Church on ideological grounds. Its youth organisation, the *Junge Gemeinde*, was particularly resented by the Party, as it rivalled the FDJ. Though not overtly political, the Church youth organisation was an alternative to the attention and loyalty of the young, and therefore its mere existence was enough to warrant anger from, the SED. Rudi Mittig, Mielke's deputy at the Stasi, at least privately believed that the Church should be neutralised, and the Stasi had placed agents at all levels, from bishops to Church lawyers. In some Church synods, up to 25 percent of the members were working as informers. Likewise, many individuals within the Church saw themselves as legitimate opposition and wanted to take greater risks. The Church became a focal point for those dissatisfied with the SED regime, and a basis for growing opposition from the mid-1980s onwards. In general, the autonomous groups were embraced by the Church, though tensions arose over the degree to which the Church would control the groups.

By 1987, the state began to feel that the Church was either unable or unwilling to control the more radical elements within it and began to attempt more open repression, as shown in the Environmental Library raid. Despite sharing a hierarchical structure with the SED, the Church did not wield strong discipline, and the SED realised it was not an effective, nor a compliant, tool for control. The impact of these small-scale groups, such as the IFM, meant that the democratisation of political life was openly debated within the Church.

The suspicion of collaboration and Stasi infiltration could suggest that the role of the Protestant Church in adding to the pressure for reform was limited. This view argues that attempting, for whatever reason, to work in the interests of both the state and reform allowed the agents of the state further control. The act of juggling the interests of the state with those of the Church and the pressure for reform meant it failed on all points. But this view simplifies the variety of opinions and the multitude of small groups under the umbrella of the Church. Individuals were not silenced and alternative views were allowed.

The key aspect of the Church is the shelter it gave for the new groups to grow and prosper. Some groups failed to develop, others were not allowed, but many successfully organised and gained self-confidence. In the summer of 1987, the Church from Below (*Kirche von Unten*) was created and showed that a new generation of Christians were rejecting the more cautious approach of the Church leaders, who were seen as tainted with the state's directives. The Church from Below immediately began working with groups like the IFM and the Environmental Library. The desire for reform had been nurtured, and its followers had learnt valuable lessons and gained experience. By 1988, it was ready to implement its demands beyond the Church into the wider society.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

The role of the Protestant Church in the pressure for reform

1 Why, and how, was the Protestant Church involved in calls for political reform?

2 How serious a threat was the Protestant Church to the SED?

The declining authority of the SED government

In the May 1989 local elections, the SED won 98 percent of the vote. Therefore, on the surface, everything might have appeared to be functioning normally. But this result, manipulated in the usual fashion, could not shelter the Party from the pressure for change. The momentum for this change blew across East Germany from both West and East. To the people of East Germany, it was obvious that the FRG enjoyed a considerably higher standard

of living, and it was increasingly clear that the best chance of achieving that standard was through political reform. From the East, Gorbachev's own demands for change highlighted to many in the GDR that the Soviet Union was further along the process for change than they were.

Forty years of indoctrination and propaganda had not created a population with unquestioning loyalty or blind faith in the system. At best, it had created compliance, with a population prepared to tolerate the system in order to avoid trouble and for a quiet life. The retreat into private life had been the tactic for long-term survival. Frustrations were vented through jokes and quiet grumblings away from public spaces. This had created a sense of camaraderie, if a pessimistic one, among the general population, but it had done little to challenge the status quo. The situation in the 1980s had changed this. There was a real possibility of an obtainable alternative, even if there was, as yet, no clear consensus of the exact political shape this would take.

While Honecker's apathy to Soviet reforms limited their impact on the leadership of the SED, the rank and file of the Party were more inclined towards the idea of reform. However, before the events of 1989, they were still reluctant to take open action against their own Party. The impetus for change was started by the citizens of the GDR themselves. The most rapid decline in support and respect for the system was seen in young people. Research by the Central Institute for Youth Research in Leipzig, conducted in 1988 and 1989, found widespread disillusionment with the GDR's socialism. A nostalgic fondness for the welfare system was not enough to counter a fear that life would simply not improve. By October 1988, less than 20 percent of young workers felt strong identification with the GDR, while 25 percent had hardly any or none at all. However, this dissatisfaction manifested itself not in passive acceptance, but in a desire to shape their own lives. This was the key impact of the changes in the late 1980s. It gave the population, particularly the young, the self-awareness and confidence to overcome their fear. The new developments calling for change from both West and East had brought fresh ideas to the GDR, transforming their pessimism to hope.

Overall, the late 1980s saw East Germany suffer declining fortunes that all combined to promote the desire for change.

- The grim conditions of the GDR economy had led to long-term stagnation that was a crucial backdrop to social and political changes.
- Gorbachev's reforms, spreading across the Eastern bloc, helped to swell discontent within the GDR.
- Demands for reform within the GDR were often protected and incubated by the Protestant Church.
- The rise of protest groups, from small single issues to multi-issue politics, gave calls for reform more confidence.
- The increasing inability of the SED to control events within the state allowed the reforms to grow.

The regime was being discredited. The general population was becoming more active in voicing their opinions, and their expressions of discontent were evolving into actual political demands. A common joke, that had helped people cope with life and accept their fate, was as follows. A man asks an East German citizen a question. 'When you die, would you rather go to a capitalist hell or a socialist hell?' The citizen replied, 'A socialist hell of course. You get roasted in the flames of hell in both cases; but in a socialist hell, there is a shortage of matches, they've run out of wood and the devil is not working at the moment.' By 1989, East Germans were asking themselves a new question: 'When you live, would you rather live under capitalism or socialism?'

The question was often met with silence, as in that summer, thousands of East Germans had already left their country by travelling through Hungary and crossing into capitalist Austria.

AS Level Exam-Style Question Section B

How accurate is it to say that Gorbachev's ideas of perestroika and glasnost were the main reason for the pressure to reform the GDR in the years 1985 to 1989? (20 marks)

Tip

You need to define perestroika and glasnost and then explain how these ideas led to the pressure for reforming the GDR. Explain the links between Gorbachev's ideas and the other pressures for reform.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

The impact of Gorbachev on the GDR, 1985 to early 1989

1 How important were pressures within the GDR for reform?

2 Explain the link between internal pressures for reform and the impact of Gorbachev on the GDR.

3 How secure was SED rule by early 1989?

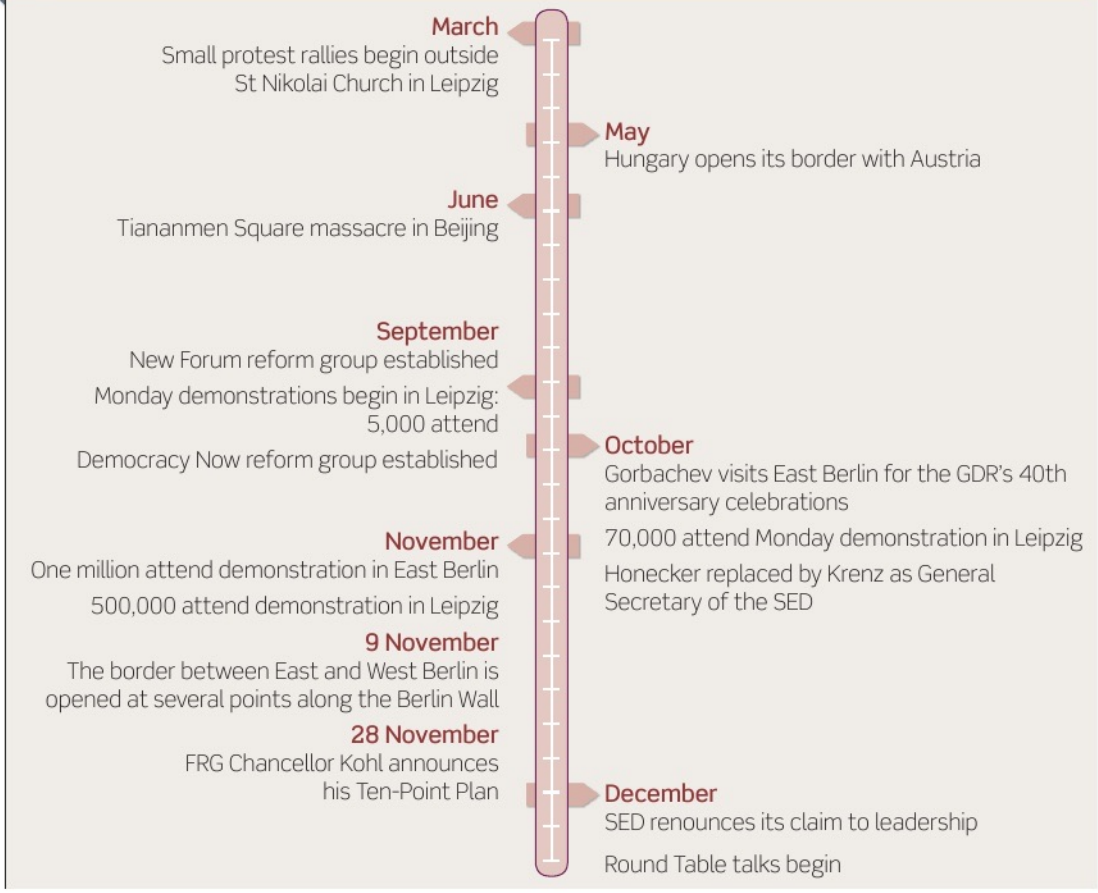
HOW DID EVENTS IN 1989 LEAD TO SUCH A SUDDEN OPENING OF THE BERLIN WALL?

In January 1989, Honecker had proclaimed that the Berlin Wall would stand for another 50, or even a 100 years. Project 'High Tech Wall 2000' planned to computerise the surveillance of the Wall, and these plans were pursued with vigour throughout 1989, despite the spiralling costs and deficiencies in technology. The objective was to prevent all escapes, while minimising the border deaths that so damaged the GDR's international reputation. However, this was made quite redundant as 'holidaying' East Germans in Hungary took advantage of the newly opened border with Austria to escape to the West.

In October, Gorbachev visited Berlin and urged Honecker to follow the Soviet example and allow controlled reform. This encouraged mass demonstrations in East Germany, and Honecker's refusal to compromise, and his inability to respond beyond the usual tool of repression, meant he was finally removed from power and replaced by Politburo member Egon Krenz, who introduced limited reforms. This might have avoided bloodshed, but the pressure for complete change was too great. With events

rapidly escalating out of SED control and demonstrations of over a million protesters in November, the citizens of East Germany took it upon themselves to open up the Wall. The dividing line between the two Germanys was gone.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS IN 1989



The opening of Hungary's border with Austria

Hungary was a communist member state of the Eastern bloc and Warsaw Pact. During the late 1980s, the Hungarian government had begun to introduce reforms, such as allowing different political parties to stand in elections and participate in government.

This was a major concern for the SED, as Hungary shared a land border with the GDR and was meant to be a loyal ally. Hungary was also a favourite holiday destination for many East Germans, who could now be exposed to, and influenced by, the changes and reforms being made in another communist state.

On 2 May 1989, Hungary began to dismantle its border with Austria – a neutral state, not part of either NATO or the Warsaw Pact. At this stage, the SED did not anticipate that its citizens would use this opportunity to travel via Hungary into Austria. Crossing the border was technically still an illegal act, though no one was arrested. By the summer, more than 30,000 East Germans had done exactly that, and legally claimed a West German passport once in Austria. Once in the FRG, the people were warmly received and often given offers of employment and housing. This encouraged more to emigrate, and on 11 September, the Hungarian government lifted all restrictions on East Germans crossing the border. East Germans also flocked to the West German embassies in Prague (Czechoslovakia), Warsaw (Poland) and Budapest (Hungary).

The SED tried to respond and limit the exodus by closing the East German border with Czechoslovakia and restricting travel to Poland in early October. However, with thousands already there, setting up camps in the grounds of the embassies, it was too late. Honecker, in an impotent

rage, had labelled the emigrants as counter-revolutionaries, and allowed them exit visas and a sealed train to take them from Poland and Czechoslovakia through the GDR and on to the FRG. However, his efforts to simply remove them backfired. At Dresden station, many more people tried unsuccessfully to board the train, and the images of a state imprisoning its own people, while violently repressing others, was replayed over and over again in the Western media. A media whose reach included the GDR.

The impact of emigration from the GDR

The most obvious impact of emigration was on the type of people leaving the GDR. From January to November 1989, over 250,000 East Germans had left, either illegally or with official permission. This exodus was motivated by a mix of political reasons and a desire for higher living standards. 75 percent were under the age of 40 and keen to integrate fully into West German society. They were well qualified, many in professions in demand such as medicine, and were keen to start a career. In short, they were exactly the kind of people the GDR could not afford to lose if it was to reverse its economic decline.

The immediate impact was even more serious to the prospects of SED control of the state. It was bad enough that East Germans were choosing the FRG over the GDR, but for those who stayed, the mass emigration was a catalyst for further opposition within the GDR. Several new protest groups were quickly set up and they were far more open in their activities than before. Two of the leading groups were Democracy Now, set up in September 1989 and consisting mainly of intellectuals, and **New Forum**, set up in September 1989, which sought a broad-based appeal and deliberately challenged the SED. Interestingly, these groups called for reform within the GDR rather than reunification. Many of the young people who had made no attempt to cross the border were students or had parents working for the state as government officials and managers. They did not want to see the GDR as a province of the FRG, but as a free and independent country. Jens Rich, one of the founders of New Forum, saw the border crossings as part of the 'emotional frenzy that gripped the country'. This energy could be used to encourage demonstrations within the GDR.

KEY TERM

New Forum
A movement formed in September 1989 to campaign for political reforms in the GDR. It was the first political organisation outside of the National Bloc to be recognised by the SED, on 8 November 1989. In February 1990, it joined with other protest groups, such as Democracy Now and the Initiative for Peace and Human Rights (IFM), to form Alliance '90.

Since March 1989, small public rallies had gathered outside the St Nikolai Church in Leipzig, usually after the weekly service. By September, the numbers attending rose to 5,000, and by the start of October, this increased to 20,000. This pattern was repeated in many cities across the region, such as Dresden and East Berlin. To make matters worse, Honecker was beginning to face dissent from within the Party. Younger members at lower levels of the SED were frustrated at the clear rejection of Soviet-style reforms. Honecker had been ill for most of the summer and had undergone a serious operation to remove his gall bladder. His incapacitation, combined with a refusal to debate policy within the SED, caused him to withdraw and not engage with the ever-changing events. This brought the government to a standstill at a time when it needed to be able to react if it was to control the situation. It was in this testing environment that Mikhail Gorbachev arrived in Berlin, on 6 October 1989.

SOURCE 5

An analysis by the GDR Ministry for State Security (Stasi) on reasons for emigration from the GDR, 9 September 1989. Recounted in K. Jarausch and V. Gransow, *Uniting Germany: Documents and Debates 1944–1993* (1994).

> The overwhelming majority of these people have an essentially negative view of problems and failures in the development of society, especially in their private lives, personal living standards, and so-called everyday shortcomings. Based on this attitude and on comparisons with conditions in the FRG and West Berlin, they assess developments in the GDR negatively.
>
> The advantages of socialism, such as social security and protection, are acknowledged; however, they are no longer seen as decisive factors in comparison with the problems and failures that have emerged. ... Doubt and disbelief exist as to the achievability of goals and the correctness of party and government policies ...
>
> As the result of a long-term process, these people come to the conclusion that a perceptible, rapid, and permanent change in their living standards, especially pertaining to satisfaction of personal desires, is only attainable in the FRG or West Berlin.

AS Level Exam-Style Question Section A

Study Source 5 before you answer this question.

Why is Source 5 valuable to the historian for an enquiry about the reasons for growing dissatisfaction with the GDR in 1989?

Explain your answer using the source, the information given about it and your own knowledge of the historical context. (8 marks)

Tip
Why might a source produced by the Stasi be particularly valuable? Where might they get their information from? Use your own knowledge to explain the reasons for growing dissatisfaction given in the source.

Gorbachev's visit to East Berlin in October

The purpose of Gorbachev's visit was to somewhat reluctantly take part in the celebrations of the GDR's 40th anniversary. For several hours, Honecker stood proudly saluting the military parade of the GDR's armed forces. Participants in the parade had been specifically chosen to represent the strong, youthful and, above all, loyal future of the GDR. However, it was to Gorbachev that they gave the most enthusiastic welcome. Official slogans were forgotten, as the parade chanted for 'Gorby' to stay in Berlin and help them. The celebrations were gatecrashed by people desperate for change, and over 700 of them were duly arrested.

Although this spontaneous demonstration was embarrassing to the regime, it was Gorbachev's message that was to prove fatal.

The Soviet leader urged Honecker to implement the Soviet-style domestic reforms that many other East European leaders had done. However, Honecker stubbornly blocked any attempt at change, no matter how small. In an attempt to justify and preserve the GDR's own existence as a separate state, he blamed the FRG for promoting rebellion. However, the GDR's existence was underpinned by the Soviet forces based in Germany. Gorbachev made it clear that the Brezhnev Doctrine was history and he would not sanction any use of Soviet troops to support the SED. Gorbachev made this decision, not just because the cost of intervention would threaten his own Soviet reforms, but because he felt that the use of force would be morally wrong. Honecker was on his own, and he had fewer moral scruples concerning force.

The slightly surreal circumstances of 6 October can be shown by the public conversation between the two leaders. Famously, Gorbachev warned Honecker that drastic change was required as 'one cannot be late, otherwise one will be punished by life'. The GDR leader replied with his own proverb, saying, 'those who are declared dead usually live a long time'. This neatly contrasts the fresh and dynamic approach of the Soviet leader with the rigid, even complacent, inflexibility of Honecker. It is not surprising that Gorbachev later commented that trying to get through to Honecker was 'like throwing peas against a wall'.

On 8 October, Gorbachev returned to Moscow. The next day, 70,000 people gathered outside Leipzig's St Nikolai Church to protest against the SED. Many in the crowd had calculated that the SED would not authorise force without the guarantee of Soviet support. However, additional armed forces and Stasi units were all put on alert. The crowd hoped for peace, but there was a genuine fear of violence as well. The fear was based on Honecker's response to the **Tiananmen Square massacre** in China earlier in the year. Honecker had previously applauded the Chinese use of violent repression, and his approval of the Chinese massacre was seen as a threat of the same repercussions if citizens of the GDR called for the same reforms.

KEY TERM

Tiananmen Square massacre (4 June 1989)
During the spring of 1989, there were student-led popular demonstrations calling for increased democracy, centred on Tiananmen Square in Beijing. The Chinese government condemned the protests of up to a million people as a counter-revolutionary riot and ordered the armed forces to crack down on the students. The result was known as the Tiananmen Square massacre, or the June 4 Massacre. Censorship of the subsequent events means that the death toll is unconfirmed, with estimates ranging from 250 to over 2,500. The event showed the communist authority's willingness to support its regime through excessive force.

The situation was extremely tense. Extra doctors and blood supplies were ordered to Leipzig to prepare for the expected casualties. Armed Stasi units waited around the demonstration, and one police officer claimed that an order was received to open fire. However, the order, if it existed, was not carried out. The real possibility of a civil war prompted Honecker to hold back. In addition, Honecker was beginning to doubt the willingness of his security forces to attack peaceful demonstrators. One Stasi report from October highlights combat groups resigning from the SED and refusing to obey orders. The Leipzig organisers were exceptionally careful to maintain a peaceful front. The self-discipline and chants of 'no violence' by all present gave no justification for retaliation against the protesters. Violence was narrowly avoided, and this lack of intervention encouraged further protests in Dresden and Berlin.

It also showed the protesters that the leadership within the SED was failing. With state force not a realistic option as long as the protests were peaceful, and the fact that Soviet forces would not reinforce the SED, it was apparent to many that the SED's time was limited. The demands of the protests were for basic freedoms of speech, assembly, press and, above all, travel. This, it was hoped, would renew the GDR. The people wanted to leave the GDR, but only to visit. They still wanted to live and work in the GDR, as the slogans *Wir sind das Volk* (We are the people) and *Wir bleiben hier* (We are staying here) indicate. Sentiments such as these echoed throughout all the spontaneous marches.

Despite the lack of organised leadership, the swelling of popular dissatisfaction was forcing the GDR to change. New Forum and other blossoming political groups offered rallying points, while the Church provided convenient places to meet, but it was the demonstrations that drove the power for reform. Speaking of the Leipzig demonstration, one protester recalled that, 'there was only one leadership: Monday 5P.M., the Nikolai Kirche [Church]'.

SOURCE 6 October 1989. Leading members of the GDR government and Gorbachev watching the parades to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the founding of the GDR.



ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

Gorbachev's visit to the GDR in October 1989
Use your own knowledge to explain why both Honecker and Gorbachev may have felt uncomfortable appearing at the event shown in Source 6.

The decline of Honecker's influence and his dismissal

Throughout October, the 77-year-old Honecker displayed a complete inability to control events. He refused dialogue with the protesters and allowed Stasi plans for mass arrests to proceed. Camps were earmarked for over 10,000 prisoners to be interned. His hard-line approach, yet failure to act decisively, persuaded some members of the Politburo of the need to remove him. It was not necessarily a difference in policy, but a question of survival for the SED. The key figure in the plot was 51-year-old Egon Krenz, head of security, widely seen as Honecker's natural heir. Indeed, his respect for Honecker had held him back until fellow Politburo member, Günter Schabowski, persuaded Krenz that the hardliners would bring them all down.

EXTEND YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Günter Schabowski (1929–present)
Schabowski was born in 1929 and rose through the ranks in Berlin and as editor-in-chief of *Neues Deutschland*. He became a full member of the Politburo in 1984 and bemusedly announced to the world's media the opening of the Berlin Wall in November 1989. After reunification, he wrote quite critically of the SED and the Politburo's leadership skills.

Together they released a statement that appeared to initiate discussion on the political crisis and reverse Honecker's condemnation of those who had emigrated to the West. When Honecker complained and sought to attack Krenz, the plotters struck. Gorbachev was informed and decided that this was purely an internal matter for the GDR. Honecker, to his surprise, was asked to resign on 17 October. Finally shaken from his stupor, Honecker launched into a spirited defence of his record, but when Mittag joined Krenz's side, he was forced to accept. Showing admirable loyalty to the communist ideal of a united front, Honecker then voted for his own removal. Honecker was allowed to cite health reasons for his resignation on 18 October and duly proposed Krenz as his successor. The architect of the Berlin Wall was gone. His Wall would only remain for another three weeks.

EXTEND YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Honecker after the resignation
In 1991, Honecker fled to Moscow, but was extradited back to Berlin to face trial. The charge was collective responsibility for the border deaths of 13 people. His continuing ill health meant the trial was abandoned, and Honecker moved to exile in Chile, where he died of cancer in 1994. With Soviet support he had plotted his way to power in 1971. Without Soviet support, he was quickly removed by a similar plot.

Conspiracy theory: trust no one
The degree of Stasi infiltration of the protest groups, which furthered the cause of reform in the late 1980s, has given rise to the conspiracy theory that the demonstrations of 1989 were steered by the Stasi in order to remove Honecker. Members of the Stasi were afraid of losing their power with Honecker's inaction.

Though there is plenty of evidence of Stasi infiltration throughout many protest groups, churches and movements, it is very unlikely that the Stasi had the power and weight to influence the waves of protests and the mass exodus during 1989. The Stasi tended to react to the situation, and its leadership was often confused and divided. No evidence has been uncovered to support the theory.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

The downfall of Honecker

How convincing do you find the view that Honecker was responsible for his own downfall?

Krenz and the opening of the Berlin Wall

Krenz immediately tried to distance himself from the past by removing old-guard Politburo members like Mielke, while Honecker, his wife Margot (Minister for Education), Mittag and several others were ejected from the Party. However, Krenz was not the East German Gorbachev that the people craved for. His SED past, admiration of the Tiananmen Square massacre and limited reforms made him

little more than a copy of Honecker. As the slightly mean-spirited, popular joke at the time asked: 'What is the difference between Krenz and Honecker? Krenz's gall bladder is still working.' Krenz hoped to satisfy the protestors by relaxing some of the travel restrictions, and he also met with Church leaders and New Forum. But these tactical concessions were designed to retain power. Propaganda was stepped up against the FRG by claiming poor treatment of the recent emigrants. His actions did nothing to stem the torrent of demonstrations.

One million people attended a demonstration in Berlin on 4 November. As they flooded into Alexanderplatz, the images were broadcast live on GDR television. Schabowski, newly in charge of the media, tried to hijack the occasion for his own SED version of reform, but his voice was drowned out by the crowds' whistles and jeers.

EXTEND YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Egon Krenz (1937–present)

Following the Politburo's vote to remove Honecker, Krenz was elected as the new General Secretary of the SED. Krenz had actually been approached by several leading SED ministers some months before about taking over from Honecker, but he had opposed such a move.

During a three-week period in October 1989, he oversaw the resignation of two-thirds of the Politburo's members, and attempted to quell increasing popular dissent by bringing in new regulations to allow visits to the West. By December, the *Volkskammer* had voted to amend the GDR's constitution by withdrawing the SED's control of government. Krenz soon resigned and was barred from being a member of the SED's successor political party – the Party of Democratic Socialism.

Later, in 1997, he was sentenced to six years in prison for offences that included electoral fraud and the manslaughter of GDR citizens who had attempted to escape from East Berlin.

Two days later, 500,000 people marched through Leipzig. As the scale grew, pessimism gave way to optimism, and this change of mood accompanied a political shift in the demonstrators. For the first time, the cries for 'Germany – One Fatherland!' were heard among the more usual calls for internal reform.

Krenz was not just feeling the pressure from the people. Czechoslovakia was concerned that the instability in the GDR would spread to its own lands, as thousands of East Germans used its open border to get the West. Krenz was forced into further concessions over travel. Between 6 and 9 November, Krenz first promised passports and visas for all East Germans, and then recommended that possession of such documents should allow emigration or a visit to the West. It was hoped that this would happen in an orderly manner and Krenz would announce it on 8 November. To add to the confusion, the whole Politburo had resigned on the morning of 9 November, in the hope that another reshuffle would convince the country they were capable of ruling. It is a sign of the disintegration of the SED and the way it was frantically reacting to events beyond its control that even this simple announcement went wrong.

On the evening of 9 November, an exhausted Günter Schabowski was answering questions from foreign journalists in a press conference broadcast live on GDR television. Stumbling as he talked, he read from a piece of paper he had received from Krenz, but not previously read. It laid out the permissions for private journeys abroad, with no need to explain a reason or give notice. The people would be free to travel from any point of the GDR, including Berlin. Schabowski then overlooked the key paragraph that announced the start date as 10 November. Rummaging through his papers, and with a shrug of his shoulders, he said that it would come into force immediately. Within an hour, the headline in the FRG news was that the GDR had opened its border and Berliners streamed towards the Wall from both sides.

Crowds at border crossings overwhelmed the border guards, who took the line of least resistance and let a few at a time, and then hundreds, cross. The border troops were as surprised as everyone else and were given no clear instructions about what to do. As the crowds, some in their pyjamas, yelled at the officers to open the gate, others queued up in their cars for over a kilometre. At the **Brandenburg Gate**, young people climbed and danced on top of the wall. At **Checkpoint Charlie**, the setting of so much Cold War tension, hundreds had gathered on both sides, while the metal barriers remained closed. West Berliners called to be let in, while East Berliners yelled to be let out. At 11 p.m., the East German Commandant opened the barrier. He had, as had all of the Commandants, made his own decision not to use force. It was not just self-preservation, but a reflection of his belief that the authorities had abandoned them.

KEY TERMS

Brandenburg Gate
One of Berlin's most iconic buildings. It was located within metres of the Berlin Wall.

Checkpoint Charlie
One of the few designated crossing points from West Berlin into East Berlin. It was controlled by the USA.

At two minutes past midnight, the GDR police announced that all border crossing points were open. The Berlin Wall was not just breached, it had fallen, and Berlin partied. East Germans were greeted with what became a frenzied all-night scene of cheering crowds and bars offering free drinks to East Germans. Trabant cars, the symbol of the GDR's basic technology and industry, came sputtering into West Berlin, driven by people with tears in their eyes. The euphoria of the two German peoples coming together was sudden and genuine. The next challenge was how to prolong it.

SOURCE 7

West Berliners in front of the Berlin Wall just two days after the opening of the border. GDR border guards were demolishing sections of the Wall to create more crossing points.



EXTEND YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Day of Fate: (9 November)

This day has proven critical in many separate years of Germany's history:

1848: The Liberal revolutionary Robert Blum was executed for his part in the 1848 Revolution

1918: The end of the German monarchy in the November Revolution

1923: Hitler's attempted seizure of power in Munich

1938: The destruction of synagogues and Jewish property during *Kristallnacht*

1989: The SED government opened the Berlin Wall

Following the reunification of Germany, 9 November was considered for a new national holiday. However, this was seen as inappropriate, especially due to the associated events of 1923 and 1938. Therefore, the date of the formal reunification of Germany on 3 October 1990 was used instead.

SOURCE 8 Brigitte Tismer reminiscing in 2014 about when she was 13 years old and living in Dresden, at the time of the opening of the Berlin Wall.

I cannot remember exactly what I thought or did on the evening the Berlin Wall opened. I do remember my parents watching the news almost in disbelief. Almost overnight the supermarket shelves filled with Mars Bars, Milka chocolate and the *Hamburger Morgenpost* [the name of a daily newspaper from Hamburg, a city in West Germany]. Things I only knew from Intershops or Christmas parcels from family friends in the FRG.

A few weeks after the 9th November, our teacher ordered us to open our planners and she told us to cross out Saturdays. No more school on Saturdays! Next, she told us that the subject of *Staatsbürgerkunde* (citizenship) will be changed. We will not be following the set syllabus anymore, but we will discussing current affairs instead and it will not be graded. I was very relieved to hear that because I was failing that course (having had a 5*).

[*Grades went from 1 to 5 (A–F equivalent)]

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

The immediate impact of the opening of the Berlin Wall

1 What does Source 8 reveal about the immediate impact of the opening of the Berlin Wall?

2 Do you think the evidence of a schoolchild would be of particular value to the historian?

Conclusion

The events of 1989 show the complexity of external, national and local issues that can combine to create momentous events, such as the opening of the Berlin Wall. Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Poland were undergoing their own revolutionary dramas. Their new-found openness gave the route for some East Germans to make it into the West. Ironically, the Soviet Union played its most vital part by doing nothing. This left the SED on its own, with a population that was unwilling to obey and, finally, unafraid to rebel. The SED destroyed itself in a futile effort to sustain its role in power. On 9 November 1989, it was the peaceful bravery of East Berliners, and East German citizens overall, prepared to stare down the border troops and the SED, that brought about change. It was an expression of people power that brought East and West to each other. Together they hugged, kissed and danced on top of the concrete slabs of the Wall, like they were upon the tombstones of a now extinct world.

However, the opening of the Berlin Wall introduced the next logical question. If the two German peoples could meet as one, then why could they not be as one?

THINKING HISTORICALLY Interpretations (5c)

Good questions/bad questions

Below are approaches attributed to three individuals who wrote about the opening of the Berlin Wall.

Anne McElvoy	Maxim Leo	John Lewis Gaddis
She was a journalist, working as the East Berlin correspondent for *The Times* newspaper. She reported on the events of 1989 from East Berlin and her reports were used by *The Times* to inform its readership in Britain.	He was born in 1970 and was living in East Berlin in 1989. In 1997, he became an editor of the *Berliner Zeitung*, one of Berlin's leading daily newspapers. In 2009, he wrote *Red Love*, an account of the impact of the GDR and its collapse on his family. His mother had been a journalist in the GDR, but she quit her job due to the restrictions placed on her work by the government.	He is one of the leading American historians of the Cold War. He is a leading member of the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations and he has been researching international history since 1968. His books on the Cold War include *We Now Know*, published in 1997, which looked at the role of Berlin and other factors in the rise and fall of the Cold War.

Work in groups.

1 Devise three criteria of what makes a good historical question.

2 Consider what you know about the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989.

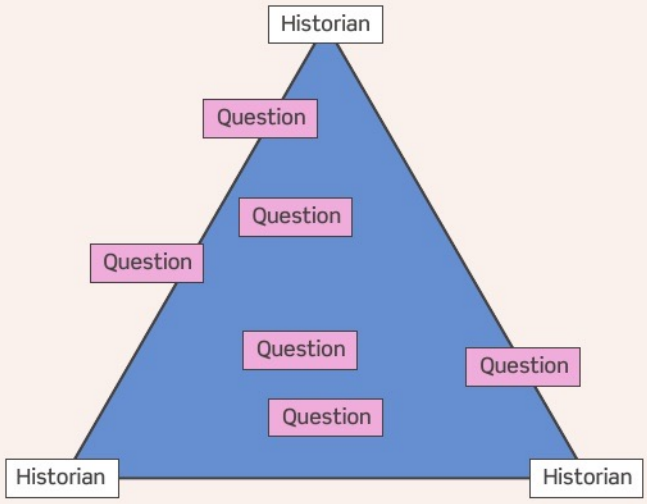
a) Each write a historical question based on the fall.

b) Put these in rank order, with the best question first, based on your criteria.

3 Using a piece of A3 paper, write the names of the three writers so that they form a large triangle.

a) Write your questions from 2a) on the piece of paper so that their positions reflect how likely the writers are to be interested by that question. For example, a question about the role of Günter Schabowski in the fall of the Berlin Wall would interest McElvoy and Gaddis, but not Leo, and so would be somewhere between McElvoy and Gaddis, but nowhere near Leo.

b) Add some further questions. Try to think of questions that only one of the three would be interested in.



4 Take it in turns to try to answer the questions you have created in the style of one of the writers. See if the other members of the group can guess which writer it is in each case.

Answer the following questions individually, using the examples created by the above activity:

5 Does one method of constructing history lead to better reasoning than the others? Explain your answer.

6 Explain why all commentators who deploy rigorous methodology are, to an extent, useful sources for the study of the past.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

1989

1 In what ways was 1989 a turning point in the history of the GDR?

2 How likely was the end of the GDR as a separate country by the end of 1989?

WHY WAS THE REUNIFICATION OF THE GDR AND THE FRG SO RAPID?

The opening of the Berlin Wall did not necessarily mean the end of the GDR as a country, or even the end of SED political domination. However, as physical, economic and social access to the West increased, the SED failed to act decisively. Weakened by internal divisions and the inability to respond effectively, the SED quickly withered away. The policy for an independent and democratic GDR favoured by the opposition groups was swept aside by the groundswell of public opinion. The call for reunification gained momentum, and it proved to be the West German chancellor, Helmut Kohl, who was flexible enough to react quickly and try to steer the process. Even then, the people's desperation for a single country following the FRG model took everyone by surprise. The 1990 March elections in the GDR revealed an overwhelming mandate for rapid reunification. Therefore, Kohl, with the blessing of the wartime Allies (albeit sometimes reluctantly), was able to speed up the reunification programme from a projected decade to under a single year. On 3 October 1990, Germany became a single country with shared currency and borders, though values would take longer to unite.

The collapse of the SED government in 1989 and the elections of March 1990

In the rest of November 1989, more than five million East Germans visited West Berlin. The vast majority returned to the GDR, but by the end of the year, nearly one million had decided to remain in the West. Despite the best efforts of Krenz, the opening of the Berlin Wall did nothing to restore the people's faith in the GDR or trust in the SED. Indeed, it was in the immediate months following 9 November that the SED fell apart, from the bottom up.

At the local level, officials felt that the Party mechanics were failing to function. Revelations of corruption at the highest levels became public knowledge, such as the relative splendour of the SED leaders' guarded forest community, and their exclusive access to Western goods through the Intershops. This hypocrisy affected the grass-roots members: feeling ideologically lost, their will to hold onto power slipped away. The opening of the Wall and the rapid rotation of leaders in the Politburo had destroyed the illusion of stability and permanence. This psychological blow crippled the Party's self-belief throughout the regional offices. Without this support, the leadership in Berlin was merely hanging on, desperate to survive, but just delaying the end.

Krenz's government tried to stem emigration from the GDR with the promise of further reforms. Proposals included free all-party elections, a media free from government control, and the liberalisation of controls on the economy. As well as government ministers being divided on whether such measures were far too radical, there was also a division forming within the Party as to whether a reformed GDR state should continue to exist as a German nation separate from that of the FRG, or whether the two German states should be reunited.

On 1 December, the *Volkskammer* amended the GDR constitution to end the SED's leading role, and two days later, Krenz, resigned to the reality that it was now impossible to gain popular support for an SED-led government, stepped down after only 44 days as General Secretary. Immediately, the **Round Table** was convened to facilitate talks between the traditional bloc parties who were no longer subservient to the SED, and the new oppositional groups such as Democracy Now and New Forum. The Round Table was an organisation designed to promote internal GDR reform such as national elections, a new constitution and the dissolution of the Stasi (renamed, if not remodelled, as the Office for National Security). It is important to note that the oppositional groups that had helped to bring the revolution about still wanted a GDR identity. They believed there was a 'third way' in which a democratic and neutral GDR could exist alongside the FRG. It was not just a case of a communist GDR or a reunified Germany. However, the hopes of these groups were dashed, as popular opinion overwhelmed them as well, and East Germany moved towards rapid reunification with the FRG.

KEY TERM

Round Table
This organisation was based on a Polish model from April 1989 and was started by the group Democracy Now. It was a forum in which representatives from the old bloc parties (such as trade unions and the women's league) came together with representatives from the new opposition groups (that had evolved from the autonomous groups of the late 1980s). Of the 33 voting members, 17 were from the new opposition groups. Echoing this new democracy, many local Round Tables were set up in cities across the GDR. Their final meeting took place in March 1990.

The last action of the SED was the promotion of Hans Modrow as leader, who now fronted a relaunched Party called the Socialist Unity Party of Germany-Party of Democratic Socialism, or SED-PDS (the SED was not dropped until February, in readiness for the national elections). Modrow had a reputation as a reformist and was apparently Gorbachev's preferred choice of leader. The new government had its political structure redesigned to remove the Politburo and Central Committee in favour of the Council of Ministers, which quickly included members of the opposition groups as the Round Table was incorporated into it. Modrow, as the new prime minister, announced free elections and economic reforms that reduced, though did not end, socialist-style central planning (see Source 9). But the continued promises were not enough to persuade the people to stay.

SOURCE 9 Hans Modrow's Government Programme, 17 November 1989. As newly appointed head of the GDR government, Hans Modrow inspired hopes of a renewal of socialism with his reform programme. He did not seem to have been influenced by Stalinist abuse of authority due to his previous position as the SED District Secretary in Dresden.

> The intended political reform already under way has provided a new foundation to preserve and implement a policy of self-determination for the people of the GDR. This gives new strength to the GDR's legitimacy as a socialist state, as a sovereign German state. Not mere claims, but rather a new reality regarding life in the GDR will serve to clearly reject unrealistic and dangerous speculations about reunification.
>
> The two German states, despite all the differences in their social systems, share a centuries-old history. Both states should take this opportunity to lend their mutual relationship a good-neighbourly character.
>
> If the two German states show each other unreserved mutual respect, they can create a worthy example of cooperative coexistence. The government of the GDR is willing to expand cooperation with the FRG to new levels. This applies to all issues: securing of peace, disarmament, economics, science and technology, environmental protection, transportation, postal and telephone services, culture, tourism, and a plethora of humanitarian issues.
>
> We are in favour of strengthening the community of responsibility of the two German states through a treaty-based union that goes far beyond that of the Basic Treaty and other previous treaties and agreements between the two states. This government is open to discussion in this regard.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

Modrow's programme for reform, November 1989

1 What does Source 9 reveal about Modrow's reform programme?

2 Using your own knowledge of the context within which this statement was made, explain why these proposals were unlikely to help the SED hold onto power.

Emigration continued to increase and to reduce the number of GDR citizens, with over 70,000 leaving for West Germany in January 1990. Economically, this represented a loss of potential productivity, and, crucially for the struggling government, it negated the legitimacy of the GDR. The country could not sustain itself as more young workers headed West. They were attracted by the delights of a consumer society that could now be tasted first-hand in visits to West Berlin. There was also no fear of an SED-led clampdown, and this gave the population confidence to participate in demonstrations. In the eyes of a majority of its people, the GDR was close to economic, political and moral bankruptcy. Support for German reunification grew rapidly.

On 25 December 1989, at the newly unveiled Brandenburg Gate in Berlin, the Christmas concert took place. The orchestra played Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. The Chorus, made up of singers from Germany, the USA, France, the UK and the USSR, changed the finale *Ode to Joy* to 'Ode to Freedom'. In a winter of symbolic events, this was a clear indication that support for an independent GDR was declining. The opposition groups, and perhaps even the remnants of the old guard, had hoped to cling to some independence for the GDR, that somehow the 'third way' would be found to preserve the country, but each day brought more calls for a 'Germany – one Fatherland', and each new crisis disintegrated the state further.

On 15 January, a protest at the Stasi headquarters in Berlin began to reveal the extent to which its covert influence had penetrated society (see Source 10). Officers were caught shredding and burning as much evidence of their guilt as possible. The protestors saved the incriminating files and then ransacked the building. The people had realised that not only was the GDR not worth saving as a separate entity, but the West German model was obtainable and already set up in West Germany.

SOURCE 10 When the PDS-led government only changed the name of the Stasi to the National Security Office, angry crowds stormed the Ministry of State Security's headquarters in East Berlin. The following report was published in *Neues Deutschland* on 16 January 1990.

> Calls to Remain Calm Go Unheeded: Hans Modrow Appeals to Reason.
>
> Berlin. At 5pm, the first demonstrators climbed the gate. Under pressure from the masses, the police opened the steel entry gate to the headquarters of the former Office of State Security in Berlin...
>
> The New Forum had called for a peaceful 'demonstration against Stasi and Nasi' [the National Security Office] last Thursday, during a demonstration at the *Volkskammer*. But as events progressed on Monday, the organisers gradually lost control.
>
> The first to enter charged to House 18, a block of offices and supply rooms. Stones smashed the glass entrance, clearing the way into the building. A large, howling crowd stormed the multistorey building. Papers and furniture flew to the pavement from the shattered windows. Rioters destroyed the rooms and plundered anything not tied down in offices, the cafeteria, a book store, and a theatre box office...
>
> Organisers and demonstrators who felt the destruction had gone too far attempted to restore order. They insisted over and over that people leave the building and stopped the rioters. They confiscated plundered inventory such as books, computer disks, telephones, uniform parts, documents, etc. Those who behaved calmly in this way were subjected to insults such as 'Are you the new Stasi?' and 'They persecuted us for forty years, now we can smash all this.'

A Level Exam-Style Question Section A

Study Sources 9 and 10 before you answer this question.

How far could a historian make use of Sources 9 and 10 together to investigate the declining authority of the SED in the years 1989–90?

Explain your answer using both sources, the information given about them and your own knowledge of the historical context. (20 marks)

Tip

Think about the context within which the sources were produced. How do they reflect the events that were happening at the time? Think about the origin and purpose of the two sources and how they affect the tone and language used.

The elections of March 1990

The first two months of 1990 were marked by a succession of economic problems, strikes and continued emigration. In an effort to implement a quick solution, the May elections were brought forward to March. In the campaign, the Round Table groups had modified their views to include a slower programme of reunification based on an equal merger. Some, like New Forum, IFM and Democracy Now, formed an election group called Alliance '90, while the Social Democratic Party (SPD) - with a more broad-based appeal and links to the West German SPD - were confident of achieving a majority. Even the PDS (former SED) accepted that a still socialist GDR would have to link itself to the FRG at some point. However, it was the coalition 'Alliance for Germany', dominated by the CDU (Christian Democratic Union), that advocated the fastest reunification with the FRG, absorbing the GDR and adopting a capitalist economy. The CDU, a former Bloc party, had shed its old leadership and now represented the centre-right, and worked closely with its West German equivalent.

The March election of 1990 was the first free election in the GDR for 60 years and the results were as follows:

- The 'Alliance for Germany' won 48 percent of the vote.
- The SPD won 22 percent.
- The PDS received a surprisingly high 16 percent, mostly from officials and intelligentsia rather than workers. There was a core group of supporters who preferred to stick with what they knew and what gave them a sense of security.
- The opposition groups that made up Alliance '90, so important in 1989, received fewer than three percent. The informal structure, casual organisation and meagre resources of Alliance '90 might help to explain their poor performance, but there can be no mistaking the fact that those who called for a faster process for reunification received the most electoral support.

The 'Alliance for Germany' had won, with 192 seats out of 400 in the *Volkskammer,* and the leader of the CDU, Lother de Maizière, headed the government as Prime Minister. There were many factors pushing the people away from the GDR and towards the rapid reunification policies of the CDU-led coalition. There was the collapse of the SED; the lack of trust in the authorities by the people; the impact of (and desire for) emigration to the FRG; the ruined economy; and the willingness for change. But one of the most effective draws for the CDU in the election campaign of 1990 was the intervention of the West German Chancellor, Helmut Kohl.

The reunification of East and West Germany, March-October 1990

Before political union could take place, economic union was needed to stabilise the GDR's decline. The FRG had enjoyed an economic boom after the Second World War, with a new currency and capitalist market policies, so Kohl hoped that this would repeat itself. He relied on the strength of the FRG to carry through a straight one-to-one replacement with the GDR DM, and, therefore, despite doubts from West Germany's financial institutions, the currency union took place on 1 July.

However, the effect on the barely functioning GDR economy was severely detrimental. Western consumer goods flooded the East while their own products, now with the government subsidies removed, remained unsold. Unemployment in the East rose throughout the summer and strikes became common. In August, 250,000 farmers demonstrated against the ending of subsidies and increasing European competition. The inefficiencies inherent in all levels of GDR industry and agriculture left them completely unprepared and incapable of competing with the West.

The effect of this economic crisis was not to put people off reunification, but to actually encourage the political process to happen more speedily, as the only solution available.

On 31 August, the Unification Treaty was signed between the governments of East and West Germany. It was agreed that the *länder* (states) of the GDR would become *länder* of the FRG on 3 October.

For reunification to legitimately occur, there had to be the agreement of both Germanys and all four of the wartime Allies (the USA, Britain, France and the USSR). This was achieved by the **Two-Plus-Four Treaty** of September. The four Allies would renounce all rights in Germany, including Berlin, and German borders were now guaranteed, including disputed ones with Poland. It also included the USSR's agreement that a reunited Germany could continue its membership of NATO, with the provision that NATO troops or weapons would not be stationed on what would be the former GDR, while there were limits on the combined Germany's military strength and a complete ban on nuclear weapons. With the negotiations complete during September 1990, there were no barriers left to reunification. Formal reunification took place on 3 October.

KEY TERM

Two-Plus-Four Treaty
The treaty signed on September 12 1990 between the two German states and the four powers,that occupied Germany at the end of the Second World War (the USA, the USSR, Britain and France). It recognised that Germany would now consist of the combined territories of the FRG and the GDR. It is also known as the Treaty on the Final Settlement with Respect to Germany. Thatcher preferred to call it the Four-Plus-Two Treaty.

The attitudes of Kohl, Britain, the USA and the USSR

The role of Chancellor Kohl was central to the process of reunification. During November 1989, Chancellor Kohl, like many politicians in the FRG, had expressed concern at the escalating events in the GDR. The mass movement of people from East to West had put financial and social pressure on the economy of the FRG. He favoured some form of monetary assistance in the hope that improved conditions in the GDR would stem emigration. However, on 28 November, Kohl, without any consultation with the Western Allies, boldly put forward a Ten-Point Plan. Among the plans for aid and redevelopment, it also proposed a federal system for the whole of Germany. The timescale was expected to be within a decade, but the acknowledgment of a unified

Germany (steered by West Germany) certainly ignited a passionate debate within East Germany, and also within the neighbouring foreign powers, who could no longer ignore the issue as merely the wishes of protestors in the streets.

Margaret Thatcher, the British Prime Minister, had serious reservations over unity, particularly the idea of a united Germany being part of a larger integrated Europe, in which it would be central (see Source 10). The British media echoed her fears of a powerful Germany. Thatcher also saw the danger of a single Germany undermining Gorbachev, whose position in the USSR was weakening, as the country faced its own economic meltdown. She tried to organise a way with President Mitterrand of France, who was also fearful of a resurgent Germany, to slow the process down. But any Anglo-French co-operation could do very little practically to prevent unification.

SOURCE 11 The British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, recalling her concerns over German reunification in early 1990, from her autobiography, *The Downing Street Years* (1993).

> Initially, it also seemed likely that the Soviets would be strongly opposed to the re-emergence of a powerful Germany, particularly one reunited on the West's terms and accompanied by the discrediting of communism. Of course, the Soviets might have calculated that a reunited Germany would return a left-of-centre government which would achieve their long-term objective of neutralizing and de-nuclearizing West Germany...
>
> In Moscow the following morning and over lunch Mr Gorbachev and I talked frankly about Germany. I explained to him that although NATO had traditionally made statements supporting Germany's aspiration to be reunited, in practice we were rather apprehensive. Nor was I speaking for myself alone – I had discussed it with at least one other Western leader, meaning but not mentioning President Mitterrand. Mr Gorbachev confirmed that the Soviet Union did not want reunification either. This reinforced me in my resolve to slow up the already heady pace of developments. Of course, I did not want East Germans – any more than I would have wanted anyone else – to have to live under communism. But it seemed to me that a truly democratic East Germany would soon emerge and the question of reunification was a separate one, on which the wishes and interests of Germany's neighbours and other powers must be fully taken into account.

ACTIVITY
CONSOLIDATION

Thatcher's attitude to German reunification

1 What can we learn from Source 11 about Thatcher's attitude towards German reunification?

2 In public statements given by Thatcher in 1989 and 1990, she appeared to be more positive towards German reunification. Explain why these statements give a different impression of Thatcher's attitude.

Britain and France's resistance was made more ineffective by the American President, George Bush's, assertion that unification should go ahead. Bush's reaction to the opening of the Berlin Wall had been lukewarm, despite overwhelming enthusiasm from the American people. In 1987, President Reagan, while in West Berlin, had roared at the Soviet regime to 'tear down this Wall', but now it was suddenly gone, Bush appeared strangely subdued. In private, though, Bush was amazed. He was conscious of not wanting to upset the Soviets over a potentially devastating loss of prestige, but he could also see that a united Germany and an end to the Cold War was a real opportunity to cut back his defence spending. In November, the US Secretary of State, James Baker, commented that it was only a matter of working out the details of when and how reunification should occur. The USA was firmly behind reunification, which rendered Britain's criticisms powerless.

In December 1989, Kohl visited the GDR, and his ecstatic reception by the East German people quickly convinced him that reunification should happen much sooner. Kohl began to take the initiative and rejected Modrow's plan that a reunited Germany should be militarily neutral, as the FRG would have to withdraw from NATO. By February 1990, Kohl explicitly supported the East German CDU on rapid reunification. Kohl eagerly campaigned within the GDR and addressed a million-strong crowd in Leipzig. The election victory for the 'Alliance of Germany' owed much to the strength of Kohl's message of hope, and much to the strength of the West German ***Deutschmark***.

With Britain's unease somewhat calmed by the promise of German membership of NATO, and clear American support, Kohl needed to address the fears of the Soviet Union. For 40 years, the GDR had

been part of the buffer zone between the USSR and its Western enemies, so it was only with the reduction of Cold War antagonism between America and the USSR that Gorbachev could accept reunification. Kohl agreed to fund the removal of Soviet troops stationed in the GDR (though some Soviet Troops privately requested to stay) and pay 12 billion DM to the cash-starved Soviets to resettle the troops back in the USSR. This deal took place in July 1990, and it paved the way for the 'Two-Plus-Four Treaty' negotiations and helped ensure final agreement for reunification.

SOURCE 12 The reactions of the French President, Francois Mitterand, to the prospect of German reunification are given here in comments made privately to his adviser, Jacques Attali.

10 November 1989

Peace! How can he [Michel Rocard, the French Prime Minister] speak of peace? It is the opposite that awaits us! It is clear that he will never understand anything about foreign policy! ... these people are playing with a world war, without seeing it.

15 November 1989

The present situation is perhaps more dangerous than before. It may lead to the reawakening of nationalities. The FRG, in the very long run, will it not take more than the GDR?

28 November 1989

[After Mitterand had received Kohl's proposals for reunification] But he did not tell me anything! Told me nothing! I will never forget it! Gorbachev will be furious; he will not let it happen, it is impossible. I do not need to oppose it, the Soviets will do it for me. Think about it, they will never accept this big Germany confronting them.

SOURCE 13 Chancellor Kohl personally campaigned in the GDR for the 'Alliance for Germany'. His proposals included a monetary union, which he maintained would bring prosperity, political union and social security. This article by Kohl was published in March 1990, in a political magazine about the forthcoming election.

The events of the past weeks and months have moved us Germans; in fact many of us have been overwhelmed by our emotions. We do not need to be ashamed of this, for we are experiencing events of incredible historic dimension. It is true: Never before since our nation was divided have we been so close to our goal - the political unity of all Germans in freedom. This is the achievement, above all, of the people in East Germany, who, through consistent peaceful protest, forced a Communist dictatorship to its knees. You can truly be proud of this fact.

... The important thing is that the first free and secret elections in the GDR will demonstrate the people's wish for democracy, for unity in freedom. The elections must result in a truly free parliament, and this in turn must form a responsible government capable of action.

I am convinced that this will happen. It is all the more important, in the time remaining until the elections, that voters become aware of the historically significant decision before them. The people in East Germany have clearly shown through their demonstrations that they no longer want socialism, that they want freedom and unity, and that they also have concrete ideas about the future economic and social order.

In short, the people in East Germany know that a social market economy can bring them - as in West Germany - freedom, affluence, social security, and a peaceful and secure future.

A Level Exam-Style Question Section A

Study Sources 12 and 13 before you answer this question.

How far could a historian make use of Sources 12 and 13 together to investigate attitudes towards German reunification in the years 1989–90? (20 marks)

Explain your answer using both sources, the information given about them and your own knowledge of the historical context.

Tip:
Think about the differences and similarities between the views of the two sources. Are they giving two differing perspectives because their focus is different? Think about the origin and purpose of the two sources and how they affect the tone and language of the sources.

source 14 Helmut Kohl waves to a crowd of East Germans in Erfurt during the campaign for the March election, 1990.



ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

The appeal of Kohl

Look at Source 14.

1 This photograph was deliberately composed for a particular purpose. What was that purpose?

2 Does the fact that this source was deliberately composed make it less valuable as historical evidence of Kohl's popularity in the GDR during early 1989?

An assessment of the role of Kohl

There has been much debate over the role and motivations of Chancellor Kohl in the unification of Germany. He could be seen as the 'architect of unification', especially in his dramatic unveiling of the Ten-Point Plan. It was also his relationship and diplomacy with both the USA and Gorbachev in the USSR that secured their blessing, or, in the Soviet Union's case, acceptance of his ideas. It is clear that Kohl was a canny enough politician to take advantage of the opportunities when they arose. His role secured his status as a leader of world prestige and certainly helped his re-election. He used the FRG's economic strength to dominate, not only the new partnership of the two Germanys, but to exploit the USSR's weakness to his advantage.

However, Kohl was also in the right place at the right time. The GDR was in an accelerating decline throughout the 1980s, and the SED proved incapable of sustaining its rule. Therefore, Kohl benefited from the circumstances he was working in rather than creating them himself. In short, Kohl was the central political figure manoeuvring round the various obstacles for reunification, be it East German or the four wartime Allies. But questions still remain as to whether it was Kohl's individual political brilliance that managed to rapidly pull Germany together, or whether 1990 was the inevitable climax to a long process of *Ostpolitik* that can be traced all the way back to Brandt in the 1970s.

The accession of the eastern territories to West Germany

The formal accession of the eastern territories to the FRG took place on 3 October, now a public holiday in Germany. The five old *länder* (states) of the GDR became *länder* of the FRG. At the same time East and West Berlin were united to form one city-state within the FRG.

The new Germany was, however, not a new state merged from the two separate Germanies that had existed before 1990. The GDR had been absorbed into the FRG and, like the Berlin Wall, dismantled.

Public approval for Kohl's relentless reunification programme can be seen in the election results of December 1990. Kohl's CDU party won a landslide victory with 44 percent of the vote (translating to 60 percent of the seats in the new ***Bundestag***). The new Germany marched towards the New Year with a sense of hope and optimism, though the majority of its new citizens were unaware how much both would prove to be needed and tested over the coming years.

The process of formal territorial accession was relatively easy compared with the task of achieving social and economic integration. East German society had lived under a different set of values for over forty years and this could not be brushed away so quickly.

Conclusion

The opening of the Berlin Wall brought about a remarkably quick process of reunification. Though many within the GDR, both within the opposition groups and those with links to the former SED rulers, wanted an independent East Germany, it was not to be. There are three main reasons for this.

- First, the movement for internal reform was unclear and not united. Arguments arose over the degree of economic freedom and the extent of democratisation. The SED's vague promises and reactive approach were not enough to take control and command the situation, while the opposition groups lacked the political weight and experience to take the lead.
- Second, Kohl did have the confidence and power to take leadership and actively promote reunification. His diplomatic skills meant he could navigate the tricky waters of the wartime Allies, especially the apprehension of Gorbachev and the USSR. The economic strength of the FRG gave the impetus by which the FRG would absorb the GDR. But it was not a hostile takeover. Kohl was astute enough a politician to understand the mood of the people.
- However, the key reason for the rapid reunification was the will of the East German people themselves. Once the call for 'Germany – one people' began to be heard among the protestors in early November 1989, it gained a momentum that carried the reunification movement along and pushed aside all who opposed it or tried to slow it down. The end of the GDR was not a foregone conclusion: as the Chinese authorities' response over Tiananmen Square showed, there were alternatives that could have been pursued. But, when it became apparent that consistent force would not be applied against the protestors, the desires of the people escalated and drove the process along at breakneck speed.

Perhaps the process of reunification was too rapid. The new Germany would face many tribulations over the next few years. The process would be far more expensive than Kohl had planned, or perhaps admitted. Economically, Germany remained a divided country. The East saw the West, or '***Wessis'***, as materialistic, while the West saw the East, or '***Ossis'***, as ungrateful. Some East Germans experienced a sense of nostalgia, known as '***Ostalgie'***, for the securities of the past such as employment and housing.

However, the melting together of the values of the two countries would take time. The GDR had been created as a result of the Cold War between the USSR and the Western Allies, particularly the USA. Therefore, it is logical that, when the Cold War tensions evaporated between the superpowers in the late 1980s, the foundations of the GDR would also vanish. It was an artificial country that had always been underpinned by the USSR. Once that reinforcement was gone, the legitimacy and authority of the SED could start to be questioned and then overturned by the spirit of the people. The realisation that the individual citizen does have the right for freedom and the sovereignty to rule can be seen on the expressions of the protestors in October and November 1989, as the Berlin Wall was breached and chiselled away by the people's actions. The revolution of 1989 was a peaceful revolution, without a single leader, but driven by the people's sheer weight of numbers and belief. Despite the resulting economic and social problems, Germany has been irrevocably transformed. No amount of '*Ostaglie'* could change that.

What the former East Germans had left behind can best be seen in the ongoing discovery of the extent of Stasi infiltration of everyday life during the 40 years of SED control. The degree and scale of the system of informers (perhaps 15 percent of the population), which included both family and friends, highlighted the fear and paranoia required for a totalitarian regime to function. For decades, the loss of liberty, and occasionally life, appeared normal to whole generations of citizens of the GDR. But, once the alternatives could be first glimpsed by tuning into West German television and radio; then visited through the opening Wall; and finally there was an opportunity to obtain them with the promises of reunification, once this path had been travelled then there could be no going back. No return to a 155km Wall to divide its people; no secret police obsessively storing secrets; no Soviet troops waiting in barracks for the orders to repress the citizens.

The 1962 image of Peter Fechter, just 18 and slowly bleeding to death as he lay within the 'death-strip' of the Berlin Wall; his twisted body stuck between the East German guards who shot him and Western onlookers too afraid to act; the image of his death and the sounds of his final screams could not be returned to, but would also never be forgotten.

ACTIVITY
KNOWLEDGE CHECK

The end of the GDR

1 When and why did popular demand change from reform of the GDR to unification with the FRG?

2 How much did the process of reunification depend on the attitudes of foreign powers?

3 When did German reunification become unstoppable? Explain your answer.

THINKING HISTORICALLY **Cause and consequence (6a)**

Seeing things differently

Different times and different places have different sets of ideas. Beliefs about how the world works, how human societies should be governed or the best way to achieve economic prosperity can all be radically different from our own. It is important for the historian to take into account these different attitudes and be aware of the dangers of judging them against modern ideas.

Chris Gueffroy (21 June 1968–6 February 1989)

During the period 1961–89, at least 136 people died trying to cross the Berlin Wall. Chris Gueffroy was the last person to be shot while trying to escape to West Berlin. On the night of 5–6 February 1989, he tried to climb over the Wall, but was shot and killed in the border strip. One of the causes of his attempt to flee was his increasing disillusionment with life in the GDR and his conclusion that life had become unbearable under socialism. Another cause was his belief that the GDR would continue to exist for a long time and would not change. He believed that the only way that he could achieve freedom was to flee to West Berlin. The government of the GDR was willing to kill escapees, even though they knew it would have a negative impact on their international reputation.

Answer the following questions:

1 What attitudes do you think had given rise to the notion that life in the West was preferable to living in the GDR?

2 If Chris Gueffroy had known how events would progress, for example, that the Wall would be opened nine months later, do you think he would have changed his attitude?

3 The state's attitude to the use of violence in the GDR was different to current attitudes in Britain.

   a) Are there any other ways in which attitudes in the GDR differed dramatically from those that are current in Britain now?

   b) Why do you think that they are different?

4 How important is it for historians to deal with events in the context of the beliefs and values of people in the past, as well as seeing them as part of a greater pattern?

ACTIVITY SUMMARY

The end of the GDR

1 The GDR was undermined by a range of factors.

   a) Explain the link between factors external to the GDR and internal factors.

   b) Explain the link between the pressure for reform from political groups and that from 'people power'.

2 Which factor do you think was the most important in bringing an end to the GDR?

WIDER READING

Bushnell, N. and Leonard, A. *Germany Divided and Reunited 1945–91*, Hodder Education (2009)

Dennis, M. *The Rise and Fall of the German Democratic Republic*, Pearson (2000)

Fulbrook, M. *Anatomy of a Dictatorship: Inside the GDR 1949–1989*, OUP (1995)

Grieder, P. *The German Democratic Republic*, Palgrave Macmillan (2012)

Jarausch, K. *The Rush to German Unity*, Berghahn (1994)

Jarausch, K. and Gransow, V. *Uniting Germany: Documents and Debates 1944–1993*, Berghahn (1994)

Maier, C.S. *Dissolution: The Crisis of Communism and the End of East Germany*, Princeton University Press (1999)

Thomaneck, J. and Niven, B. *Dividing and Uniting Germany*, Routledge (2001)

Waller, S. *From Defeat to Unity: Germany 1945–91*, Nelson Thornes (2009)

Preparing for your AS Level Paper 2 exam

Advance planning

1. Draw up a timetable for your revision and try to keep to it. Spread your timetable over a number of weeks, and aim to cover four or five topics each week.
2. Spend longer on topics that you have found difficult, and revise them several times.
3. Above all, do not try to limit your revision by attempting to 'question spot'. Try to be confident about all aspects of your Paper 2 work, because this will ensure that you have a choice of questions in Section B.

Paper 2 overview:

AS Paper 2	Time: 1 hour 30 minutes	
Section A	Answer 1 compulsory two-part sources question	8+12 marks = 20 marks
Section B	Answer 1 question from a choice of 3	20 marks
	Total marks =	**40 marks**

You should familiarise yourself with the layout of the paper by looking at the examples published by Edexcel. The questions for each section are followed by eight pages of lined paper where you should write your answer.

Section A questions

Each of the two parts of the question will focus on one of the two contemporary sources provided. The sources together will total around 300 words. The (a) question, worth 8 marks, will be in the form of 'Why is Source 1 useful for an enquiry into…?' The (b) question, worth 12 marks, will be in the form of 'How much weight do you give the evidence of Source 2 for an enquiry into…?' In both your answers you should address the value of the content of the source, and then its nature, origin and purpose. Finally, you should use your own knowledge of the context of the source to assess its value.

Section B questions

These questions ask you to reach a judgement on an aspect of the topic studied. The questions will have the form, for example, of 'How far…', 'To what extent…' or 'How accurate is it to say…'. The questions can deal with historical concepts such as cause, consequence, change, continuity, similarity, difference and significance. You should consider the issue raised in the question, consider other relevant issues, and then conclude with an overall judgement.

The timescale of the questions could be as short as a single year or even a single event (an example from Option 2C.2 could be, 'To what extent was Russia's involvement in the First World War responsible for the fall of the Provisional Government in 1917?'). The timescale could be longer depending on the historical event or process being examined, but questions are likely to be shorter than the those set for Sections A and B in Paper 1.

Use of time

This is an issue that you should discuss with your teachers and fellow students, but here are some suggestions for you.

1. Do not write solidly for 45 minutes on each question. For Section A it is essential that you have a clear understanding of the content of each source, the points being made, and the nature, origin and purpose of each source. You might decide to spend up to ten minutes reading the sources and drawing up your plan, and 35 minutes writing your answer.
2. For Section B answers you should spend a few minutes working out what the question is asking you to do, and drawing up a plan of your answer before you begin to write your response.

Preparing for your AS Level exams

Paper 2: AS Level sample answer with comments

Section A

Part A requires you to:

- identify key points in the source and explain them
- deploy your own knowledge of the context in which events took place
- make appropriate comments about the author/origin/purpose of the source.

Study Source 5 (Chapter 4, page 368) before you answer this question.

Why is Source 5 valuable to the historian for an enquiry about the reasons for growing dissatisfaction within the GDR in 1989? (8 marks)

Average student answer

Source 5 states that people in East Germany were unhappy because they have 'an essentially negative view of problems and failures'. The source tells us that this attitude was due to how they viewed their living standards, especially when they made 'comparisons with conditions in the FRG and West Berlin'. It seems that East Germans did recognise that there were advantages of living under socialism and the source makes reference to 'social security and protection', but these are no longer considered to be enough. These negative attitudes have led to 'doubt and disbelief' as to 'the correctness of party and government policies'. Therefore the source is valuable because it outlines the reasons why many people felt dissatisfied with the GDR and wanted to move to the West.

This paragraph is weak because, although it describes the content of the source, it does not use the source to support inferences.

The source is produced by the GDR Ministry of State Security who spied on most East Germans. Because of their extensive network of spies they would have a good idea of what the population's attitudes would be. The government of the GDR was always worried about the population and how it viewed the West and Source 5 shows that they had good reason to be worried. By 1989, the people of East Germany were dissatisfied because of shortages of goods in the shops and a limited range of consumer goods, for example people would often have to wait for ten years before they received a car they had ordered. The poor quality of housing was also a consistent cause of complaint against the state, who provided it. The heavy-handed use of police surveillance also caused resentment. There was a growing recognition that socialism, as practised by the SED, would never deliver the standard of living it promised and that was desired by the population.

This paragraph makes some use of the information given about the source, but its value is not discussed. Own knowledge of the historical context is included, but it is not linked directly to the source.

Thus, by giving an assessment of the problems of living in the GDR, as viewed by the population, Source 5 is valuable. It draws attention to the issues that caused growing dissatisfaction.

A relevant judgement, but it would be better if it was developed with some reasoning.

Verdict

This is an average answer because:

- it demonstrates some understanding of the source material and attempts analysis
- there is some evaluation of the source by reference to its origin and it begins to suggest why this might make it valuable evidence
- it deploys some own knowledge with limited links to the content of the source.

Use the feedback on this answer to rewrite it, making as many improvements as you can.

Paper 2: AS Level sample answers with comments

Section A

Part B requires you to:

- interrogate the source
- draw reasoned inferences
- deploy your own knowledge to interpret the material in its context
- make judgements about the value (weight) of the source in terms of making judgements.

Study Source 10 (Chapter 1, page 300) before you answer this question.

How much weight do you give the evidence of Source 10 for an enquiry into the reasons for the uprising of June 1953? (12 marks)

Average student answer

The source is useful because it gives a view of the reasons for the uprising of June 1953. It calls the uprising 'a fascist provocation' and states that the uprising was organised by the enemy from 'across the sector border'. It outlines how the West encouraged the workers in the GDR to 'lay down their tools' and how Western agents 'mislead them with inflammatory slogans'. The result was that the workers in the GDR demonstrated against the government. The source suggests that the uprising was not an uprising of the people but an organised series of actions by the West that was designed to bring down the government of the GDR. This view is presented by the East German Politburo, the main decision-making body in the GDR, and clearly has weight as evidence of how the regime saw the uprising.

The uprising was a serious threat to the government of the GDR and was mainly caused by the actions of the government. The workers were unhappy because, in June 1953, the government had announced the need for industrial productivity to increase by ten percent while workers' wages would remain unchanged. The uprising began when 300 builders working on a construction project to develop East Berlin's 'Stalinallee' went on strike, demanding the lowering of the ten percent increase in productivity. Other builders joined the protests, and strikes and demonstrations spread across the whole of the GDR, partly due to East Germans listening to the news on West Berlin radio stations. The demands of the protestors became increasingly political, with calls for an end to the SED and a genuine choice of political parties at elections. The source gives us the perspective of the government in relation to these events.

Overall, this source carries some weight as evidence of the reasons for the uprising because it gives the historian a clear view of how the government of the GDR viewed it. This interpretation offered by the government was, however, propaganda and ignores the fact that it was the government's own actions that had played a large part in causing the uprising to take place. The source is, therefore, trying to discredit the West by blaming them for stirring up the unrest rather than the SED taking responsibility itself.

This is a weak introduction because it is not sharply focused on the weight of the evidence. The answer tends to summarise the content of the source. It would be better to draw inferences from the evidence about how the Politburo wished to present the uprising to its population. The last point is better, but needs developing and illustrating, for example, why was the label 'fascist' used?

This section has good own knowledge about the uprising, but it is not used to put the source within its historical context. It would be better to use this context to highlight what is ignored by the source and to consider the reasons for this.

A thoughtful conclusion that contains a judgement focused on the weight of the evidence. It would be better if these points were developed and supported within the answer.

Verdict

This is an average answer because:

- there is some interrogation of the source, but it contains descriptive passages without relevant inferences
- there is some background information, but this is not securely linked to the focus of the question
- there is an overall judgement, but it lacks substance.

Use the feedback on this answer to rewrite it, making as many improvements as you can.

Paper 2: AS Level sample answer with comments

Section A

Part A requires you to:

- identify key points in the source and explain them
- deploy your own knowledge of the context in which events took place
- make appropriate comments about the author/origin/purpose of the source.

Study Source 5 (Chapter 4, page 368) before you answer this question.

Why is Source 5 valuable to the historian for an enquiry about the reasons for growing dissatisfaction within the GDR in 1989? (8 marks)

Strong student answer

Source 5 is of value to the historian enquiring about the growing dissatisfaction in the GDR because it outlines the main reasons for negative attitudes to the state, as compiled by a government agency that collected a vast amount of information on which to base its findings. The source draws attention to the point that many in the population were dissatisfied despite recognising that there were advantages to the socialist system. By advantages the source is referring to social provision, such as childcare and support for women, especially in the workplace. The education and health systems of the GDR were generally effective, but it often lacked the resources of their West German equivalents. By 1989, the contrast with the West had become a particular issue for many East Germans. Source 5 mentions that many people had come to the conclusion that improved living standards were 'only attainable in the FRG or West Berlin'. This attitude had grown as East Germans became more aware of life in the West through exposure to Western television and radio.

The source is valuable because it provides good evidence that the population was making links between the problems they faced and the political system, as the source states 'doubt and disbelief exist as to… the correctness of party and government'. The key point is made that growing dissatisfaction was, by 1989, becoming more critical of the SED party and moving towards thoughts of reforming, and even dismantling, the socialist system. Thus, we can infer that the reasons for dissatisfaction were political as well as economic. These thoughts had been promoted by Gorbachev, the Soviet leader, and his ideas of perestroika and glasnost.

The conclusions drawn by Source 5 are given considerable value because they were made by the GDR's Ministry of State Security or Stasi. This organisation, controlled by the SED, used an extensive system of surveillance involving over 90,000 full-time informers. The Stasi was incredibly well informed and therefore its conclusions were based on a lot of evidence. The fact that this report was compiled in September 1989, one month before the celebrations of the 40th anniversary of the GDR and with Hungary about to open its borders to the West, probably reflects growing anxiety on the part of the East German government, suggesting that dissatisfaction was growing to the point where large numbers of GDR citizens not only wished to leave their country, but were about to do so.

To conclude, Source 5 is valuable because it highlights the complexity of reasons for the growing dissatisfaction in the GDR. The fact that the source is provided by the Stasi makes it valuable as evidence based on a vast range of information that also indicates the regime was well aware of this dissatisfaction.

These sections are effective because they use own knowledge to explain points made from the source. There is a focus on the value of the evidence.

The nature and origin of the source are used well to consider the value of the source and it is focused on the specific question.

A sharply focused conclusion with a clear judgement.

Verdict

This is a strong answer because:

- it selects key points from the source relevant to the specific question
- the value of the source is discussed and related to the focus of the enquiry
- it deploys appropriate own knowledge accurately and effectively in combination with the source.

Paper 2: AS Level sample answer with comments

Section A

Part B requires you to:

- interrogate the source
- draw reasoned inferences
- deploy your own knowledge to interpret the material in its context
- make judgement about the value (weight) of the source in terms of making judgements.

Study Source 10 (Chapter 1, page 300) before you answer this question.

How much weight do you give the evidence of Source 10 for an enquiry into the reasons for the uprising of June 1953? (12 marks)

Strong student answer

The source would carry limited weight and value for any enquiry into the reasons for the rising of June 1953. As a statement by the Politburo, the top decision-making body of the Party, the source gives the historian the perspective of the SED government relating to the causes of the rising and how it wished the rising to be portrayed to its own population. It does not, however, give us a full picture of the reasons for the rising.

This answer starts with a relevant assertion that can be argued through the answer.

The source illustrates how the government of the GDR blamed 'fascist provocation' from the enemy 'across the sector border'. This is a reference to agents from the West who were supposedly acting to stir up trouble against the GDR. To label these agents as 'fascist' was a useful method of discrediting the West because it recalled the struggle against the Nazis. Other techniques are used to discredit the West in the source, such as calling the rising 'organised' and listing its targets as 'food warehouses, school dormitories, clubhouses and shops' – targets that would disrupt the lives of the workers themselves. These accusations are of limited value as historical evidence. It is true that there were Western agents, intent on stirring up trouble, who were operating in the GDR at this time, but this detracts from the evidence of participants in the protest that the uprising was a spontaneous reaction to the government's directive to increase industrial productivity by ten percent, without raising wages. These demands, coming on top of the hardships endured by the workers due to the impact of the Second World War, were the last straw for many. In this sense the government had provoked the uprising, not fascist agents. This source highlights how the Politburo tried to deflect attention from their own responsibility for the rising by trying to discredit the West. In contrast, the GDR is described in positive terms as a guardian of 'unity and peace'. When this purpose of the statement is considered, the weight of the source as evidence becomes more limited.

A focused and well-balanced discussion of the weight we can attach to the evidence by reference to the purpose of the source. Own knowledge is used to consider the reliability of the source's content.

Although the source ignores the economic causes of the rising, it does acknowledge that the protests turned into 'a demonstration against the government'. Where the source is correct is in highlighting this political dimension. The protestors' chants also took on an increasingly overt political tone. The targets of the protestors included prisons, police stations, offices and courthouses, symbols of SED power. This allows us to question the reliability of the statement in the source about attacks on social targets, such as schools and food warehouses.

This section is effective because it uses own knowledge to confirm and challenge the source.

Overall, the weight of this source as evidence of the true reasons for the rising is decidedly limited as it ignores the economic decisions made by the GDR government that provoked the protests. The angle taken by the Politburo statement is one that seeks to hide the responsibility of the SED for the workers' unrest, an embarrassment for a government that was supposed to represent the interests of the workers.

This is an effective conclusion because the judgement is based on sound reasoning.

Verdict

This is a strong answer because:

- it has a sharp focus on the issues relevant to the question
- it makes effective use of own knowledge to confirm and challenge the content of the source
- it makes an overall judgement about the value of the source that is reasoned and supported.

Paper 2: AS Level sample answer with comments

Section B

These questions assess your understanding of the period in some depth. They will ask you about the content you learned about in the four key themes, but may not ask about more than one theme. For these questions remember to:

- give an analytical, not a descriptive, response
- support your points with evidence
- cover the whole time period specified in the question
- come to a substantiated judgement.

How far did Western influences have an impact on the GDR between 1961 and 1985? (20 marks)

Average student answer

Western influences came in many forms, but popular music, television and films were the main ways in which East Germans found out about life in the West.

Western influences were limited by the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961, but they still went on. Music from the West was an important influence. Western radio stations, such as Radio Luxembourg, transmitted across much of the GDR. This allowed many East Germans to listen to the latest musical trends. In the 1960s, this included British groups such as the Beatles and the Rolling Stones. The music from Western broadcasts was often recorded on homemade equipment or, by the 1970s, cassette players, and was widely distributed. Some Western music was allowed on East German radio stations, but this was limited by government regulations to no more than 40 percent of all music played. By the late 1970s, new Western musical trends, such as disco and punk, became popular with young people. Music could be seen and heard in Western television broadcasts. The West German show Beat-Club was popular with young people in the GDR. Attempts by the government to limit Western influences failed. Licences for live music groups were taken away if the group persisted in playing Western songs. The government encouraged young people to make pledges in public that they would not listen to music from the West.

One important influence from the West was that of fashion. Citizens of the GDR were able to see images of Western fashions through the broadcasts of West German television stations transmitted across the GDR. These images were reinforced by access to magazines smuggled or posted into East Germany. The West German magazine 'Bravo', which was linked to the Beat music craze, was popular. One fashion that became popular in the 1960s was long hair for young men, a style referred to as the mushroom head. East German mothers and sisters were often set to work adapting clothes mass-produced in the East so that they copied the appearance of those in the more fashionable West. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, punk fashions were copied by young East Germans and it was common to see East German punks with Mohican hairstyles gathered around the fountain in the middle of East Berlin's main shopping centre, Alexanderplatz.

This is a weak start to the answer. The response has not made any substantial point on the question and there is no attempt to make a judgement on 'impact' that can form the basis of an argument.

This paragraph has some reasonable information related to the topic, but it does not address the impact of these influences. It would be better if the paragraph had started with an assertion made about the impact of Western influences and used information to develop and explain the point.

This section has some detail on Western influences, but not all of it is relevant or focused. The answer is weak because the analysis is generalised. It would be better to explore the impact of these influences on different groups of young people.

The East German authorities disliked this trend towards adopting Western influences, and any youth put into custody would have their head shaved in the style of a soldier and their clothes were exchanged for practical overalls. In 1965, the Central Committee of the SED issued a directive that brought in new controls and punishments to stem the tide of Western influences. The role of the Free German Youth organisation in disciplining wayward youth and trying to instil good socialist values was increased.

This section lacks focus. The information about the actions of the authorities towards Western influences could be used to support a point about the impact of influences on the government and its concerns about the younger generation.

Films were another channel for Western influences into the GDR. The East German television station had a limited budget for purchasing rights to show Western films and, as a result, Western films on television were often shown several years after their release in the West. A similar pattern existed for cinema releases. Nonetheless, by the early 1980s, many Hollywood blockbusters were distributed into the GDR. 'Close Encounters of the Third Kind', 'ET' and 'Fame' were popular with East German audiences. James Bond films were banned by the GDR on the grounds that they glorified Western spies. The impact of Ostpolitik in the early 1970s did much to increase Western influence. The freeing-up of travel restrictions that occurred as a result of Ostpolitik led to many grandparents visiting relations in the West and then bringing back Western magazines and music cassettes as presents for their grandchildren.

This section shows some knowledge of Western influences, but does not explicitly explore their impact.

Although there was a considerable range of methods by which Western influences got into the GDR, it should be remembered that these influences were competing against a state system of control that included schools, the FDJ youth organisation, national conscription into the army (NVA) and a system of allocating university courses and good jobs only to those who showed their loyalty to socialism and conformity with the wishes of the government. It should be no surprise that, in this situation, the impact of Western influences remained limited and superficial.

Taken as a whole, Western influences did much to offer the people living in the GDR the image of a possible alternative to their own drab lives. Fuelled by these images of a better life in the West, many East Germans started to consider the idea of escaping across the Wall. Thus, the impact of Western influences was a key element in encouraging 'border assailants' (Grenzverletzer). Most of these failed in their attempts to flee the GDR and continued to live their lives in East Germany, with a growing sense of disillusionment reinforced by their access to Western influences.

This is a better paragraph because it is more sharply focused on impact and attempts to assess the extent of this impact. It would be better if these points were supported by a greater amount of precise, detailed information.

This is a reasonable conclusion because it makes a relevant judgement on impact. It would be better if it dealt with 'how far' in a more sophisticated manner, for example by considering whether the impact varied according to social group.

Verdict

This is an average answer because:

- there is some attempt at explanation, but there are descriptive passages, including some that do not appear directly relevant
- the material included is accurate, but it is lacking in depth in several places
- there is an attempt to reach an overall judgement with some comment on impact, but there is only a limited attempt to assess extent by considering 'how far'.

Use the feedback on this answer to rewrite it, making as many improvements as you can.

Paper 2: AS Level sample answer with comments

Section B

These questions assess your understanding of the period in some depth. They will ask you about the content you learned about in the four key themes, but may not ask about more than one theme. For these questions remember to:

- give an analytical, not a descriptive, response
- support your points with evidence
- cover the whole time period specified in the question
- come to a substantiated judgement.

How far did Western influences have an impact on the GDR between 1961 and 1985? (20 marks)

Strong student answer

The building of the Berlin Wall in 1961 gave the GDR authorities optimism that they now had the chance to develop their own socialist society without the intervention of influences from the West. This optimism soon waned as it became clear that, despite the fact that the Wall provided a physical barrier to movement of people between East and West, Western influences remained widespread. Images of life in the West spread into the GDR by radio, television, magazines and other consumer items, often smuggled into the country. The impact of these influences on the population varied depending on their age and personality. They also had an impact on the government, who viewed these influences with suspicion as agents of capitalism designed to undermine the socialist state. Western influences were to play a part in encouraging citizens to attempt to flee the GDR, but they more often produced a growing sense of disillusionment with socialism that gradually eroded the authority of the SED.

This is a strong opening paragraph that places Western influences into the context of the restrictions resulting from the Berlin Wall. There is a sharp focus on 'impact' and an assertion is made about the impact that can be argued in the essay.

Most citizens of the GDR had access to Western influences, but it was youth who were most affected by their impact. Many young people developed an appetite for Western music from the early 1960s onwards. Compared with the popular music produced by approved artists within the GDR, Western musical styles were often viewed as exciting, even dangerous. The 1960s saw the influence of Beat music, as represented by the Beatles and the Rolling Stones. Transmitted into the GDR by Western radio stations, such as Radio Luxembourg and NATO's own stations, their influence became widespread. By the 1970s, access to Western music was made easier by the mass production of televisions, on which Western stations could be picked up after a little fiddling with the aerial. West German programmes such as Beat-Club were popular. Magazines such as 'Bravo' reinforced the fashions associated with the latest music trend and it was this aspect of Western influences that troubled the authorities in the GDR.

This section is effective because it includes precise examples of Western influences, but it does not lose sight of the focus on 'impact'.

While most young people listened to Western music, it was its influence on a particular group of young people that concerned the authorities. Western music, and its associated fashions, were often used as a form of rebellion against the state by those youths who were disillusioned. It represented a way in which some young people could show their unwillingness to conform to the narrow expectations of the East German government. Thus, growing your hair long in the so-called 'mushroom head' style indicated your resistance to conformity and the authorities. From the Teddy boys of the 1960s to the punks of the 1980s, musical fashion was a symbol of young people rejecting the values of the GDR. The group most likely to be influenced by these trends were young working-class males, especially those who had just left school with poor qualifications and had become apprentices. The harsh realities of working life created a sense of disillusionment that was fed by images of a better life and greater freedom in the West. The number of young people who became Beat boys or punks was small, but the GDR authorities tended to view all youth with suspicion and were often nervous in their dealings with young people who showed outward signs of non-conformity. The impact of Western influences, they believed, had the potential to affect the social stability of the GDR. This view reflected a degree of

This is a well-developed paragraph. The impact of Western influences is explored in depth and the answer goes beyond the general impact on youth to examine which particular groups were most affected. It also explores the nature of this impact.

paranoia on the part of the government, but there were occasions when their fears were realised. In 1965, a gathering of 2,500 Beat music fans in Leipzig protested about restrictions on Beat groups performing in the city. The authorities' nervousness was illustrated by the fact that over 1,500 of the 'protestors' were actually police informers. This was just one of many demonstrations that took place at this time. Government restrictions did little to stop the activities of these groups of young people. Gangs were common in most of the cities of the GDR. In Leipzig the Capitol gang was notorious. These gangs often congregated outside the local cinema and openly listened to Western radio broadcasts to provoke the local police. By the 1980s, punk music was the choice of those young people who wished to show their defiance of the authorities and socialist values. These groups were outside the influence of the FDJ, whose attempts to exert discipline over wayward youth outside school were often ineffective. To disillusioned working-class youth, the West represented a dream world in sharp contrast with their own drab, dead-end lives.

Much of the behaviour encouraged by access to Western influences was not openly political. Most young people wanted greater freedom of individual expression rather than the removal of the SED or an end to the GDR. Nonetheless, these influences did feed into a growing disillusionment that produced increasing numbers of 'border assailants' (Grenzverletzer). Young, single men made up the majority of those seeking to flee the GDR. Yet Western influences were often only one factor in the decision to try to leave the country. The activities of the authorities, such as constant surveillance by the Stasi, restrictions on freedom and the blocking of job opportunities were also key factors and, for those with family responsibilities, they could be more decisive than images of a fantasy world in the West.

Western influences may have encouraged a section of youth to defy the authorities, but most conformed. The regime had plenty of methods they could use to indoctrinate the population with socialist values. The education system, FDJ and the system of using loyalty to the Party as a gateway to university and good jobs ensured that the impact of Western influences remained limited and that most people conformed, at least outwardly. The introduction of conscription in 1962 proved a valuable tool for the SED to maintain its ideological influence over young males. Despite these methods of socialist control, as early as 1964 the government of the GDR recognised that Western influences could not be prevented. Instead, it tried to restrict and control access. In 1964, the Youth Code allowed more independence for young people. A pop radio station, DT64, aimed to cater for interest in Western popular music, but the amount of Western music that could be played was restricted to 40 percent. Listening to Western television was tolerated from the 1970s, an acknowledgement by the government that it could not stop Western influences. Watching Western films and other programmes could actually act as a force for social stability by providing harmless escapism from people's normal dull lives.

In conclusion, widespread Western influences seeped into the GDR, but their impact was limited and varied. They had to compete with the instruments of socialist control that were dominant in GDR life. The glitzy freedom of the West may have held a particular attraction for the young, but for the older generation, less concerned with youth music and fashions, their main interest was in listening or watching West German news coverage. This was a useful counterweight to the propaganda put out by East German news. The result of this was a growing scepticism of the SED's claims of its economic achievements and political successes. Thus, as with their impact on youth, while Western influences were not a serious threat to the regime, they gradually eroded the authority of the SED.

This section is effective because it is assessing the nature of the impact of Western influences in their wider context. The answer shows an awareness that other factors worked alongside Western influences to cause people to become *Grenzverletzer*.

This section is effective because it looks at the limits of Western influences, and therefore focuses on the key words in the question, 'how far'.

The conclusion makes a judgement that is reasoned and developed. A good point is made about the impact on the older generation, which could have been more developed in the answer. 'Impact' is explored in a precise manner rather than generalised.

Verdict

This is a strong answer because:

- the key issues relevant to the question are explored, and there is a sharp focus on the impact of Western influences and the extent and nature of this impact
- a wide range of accurate material is deployed to support the points made
- the argument throughout the answer is well-organised, coherent, logical and persuasive.

Preparing for your A Level Paper 2 exam

Advance planning

1. Draw up a timetable for your revision and try to keep to it. Spread your timetable over a number of weeks, and aim to cover four or five topics each week.
2. Spend longer on topics that you have found difficult, and revise them several times.
3. Above all, do not try to limit your revision by attempting to 'question spot'. Try to be confident about all aspects of your Paper 2 work, because this will ensure that you have a choice of questions in Section B.

Paper 2 overview

AL Paper 2	Time: 1 hour 30 minutes	
Section A	Answer 1 compulsory source question	20 marks
Section B	Answer 1 question from a choice of 2	20 marks
	Total marks =	**40 marks**

You should familiarise yourself with the layout of the paper by looking at the examples published by Edexcel. The questions for each section are followed by eight pages of lined paper where you should write your answer.

Section A questions

This question asks you to assess two contemporary sources totalling around 400 words, and will be in the form of 'How far could the historian make use of Sources 1 and 2 together to investigate…?' Your answer should examine each source separately, and you should make three points on each source: the value of its content: its nature, origin and purpose; and then you should use your own knowledge of the context of the source to assess its accuracy and value. Finally, you should make a few concluding points on the two sources taken together as a set.

Section B questions

These questions ask you to reach a judgement on an aspect of the topic studied. The questions will have the form, for example, of 'How far…', 'To what extent…' or 'How accurate is it to say…'. The questions can deal with historical concepts such as cause, consequence, change, continuity, similarity, difference and significance. You should consider the issue raised in the question, then other relevant issues, and conclude with an overall judgement.

The timescale of the questions could be as short as a single year or even a single event (an example from Option 2C.2 could be, 'To what extent was Russia's involvement in the First World War responsible for the fall of the Romanovs in 1917?'). The timescale could be longer depending on the historical event or process being examined, but questions are likely to be shorter than the those set for Sections A and B in Paper 1.

Use of time

This is an issue that you should discuss with your teachers and fellow students, but here are some suggestions for you.

1. Do not write solidly for 45 minutes on each question. For Section A it is essential that you have a clear understanding of the content of each source, the points being made, and the nature, origin and purpose of each source. You might decide to spend up to ten minutes reading the sources and drawing up your plan, and 35 minutes writing your answer.
2. For Section B answers you should spend a few minutes working out what the question is asking you to do, and drawing up a plan of your answer before you begin to write your response.

Preparing for your A Level exams

Paper 2: A Level sample answer with comments

Section A

You will need to read and analyse two sources and use them in tandem to assess how useful they are in investigating an issue. For these questions remember to:

- spend time, up to ten minutes, reading and identifying the arguments and evidence present in the sources; then make a plan to ensure that your response will be rooted in these sources
- use specific references from the sources
- deploy your own knowledge to develop points made in the sources and establish appropriate context
- come to a substantiated judgement.

Study Sources 15 and 16 (Chapter 1, page 306) before you answer this question.

How far could the historian make use of Sources 15 and 16 together to investigate the reasons why the Berlin Wall was built? (20 marks)

Average student answer

The two sources present evidence that can be used to reflect on the reasons for the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961. The two sources give us different perspectives: one is that of the Soviet government and the other is that of a schoolchild who experienced the impact of the Wall. The Soviet government's perspective was that the Wall was built as a response to the actions of the West, which were undermining the GDR, whereas the schoolchild's account shows that the Wall was a necessary consequence of the actions of the GDR government in creating a state that its population did not want to live under.

Source 15, the statement issued by the Soviet government, offers a claim that the Wall had to be built because of the 'subversive activity diversion, and espionage' that was being used by the West. The source clearly states that these activities were directed by 'the Government organs and concerns of the FRG led from West Berlin'. The Soviet statement uses accusations of 'deception, bribery and blackmail' against West Germany and puts the blame for the large numbers of people migrating from East Germany squarely on the shoulders of the capitalist FRG. This perspective makes a case for the Wall being caused by the West rather than the government of the GDR, who, according to the Soviet government, were forced to build the Wall as a defensive measure. This viewpoint is a rather dubious statement, but it clearly shows the spin put on events by the Soviet government.

A very different view is presented by Source 16. This contains evidence from a schoolchild who has recorded her own thoughts immediately after the Berlin Wall was erected, as well as the views of her friends and classmates. This evidence makes it clear that even young schoolchildren recognised that there was more to the Wall than a defensive action against the subversive activities of the West. Anne has clearly been influenced by her parents who were minor officials in the government of East Germany. She seems to accept the view of the GDR authorities that the Wall was a 'protecting rampart to keep bad people out of the country'. We can infer from this that the official statements issued, such as that in Source 15, were believed by some of the citizens in the GDR. However, Source 16 also gives us evidence that not all were convinced by the official line. Anne's school friends describe the GDR as a 'prison' and a 'lousy dictatorship'. This implies that some of the population knew that the government of the GDR was building

This introduction is quite promising because the answer deals with both sources and emphasises their different perspectives. The value of these different perspectives will need to be developed and explained in the main body of the response.

This section is weak because it tends to state the perspective of the source without discussing its validity. The last point is better because it shows an awareness that the source is giving an opinion that needs testing. It would be better if the statement was developed with the use of own knowledge to test the validity of the viewpoint offered in the source.

the Wall to shore up an unpopular state that treated its own citizens so badly that many wished to leave. The statement that the GDR was 'busy trying to save its own skin' suggests that the GDR built the Wall as an act of desperation. The last section of the source highlights the fact that the idea that the West could be blamed for subversive activities was undermined by access to Western television. Anne's school friends were able see that the GDR government's reasons for the Wall were part of a propaganda campaign to attack the West and therefore encourage an acceptance of the need for the Wall as a defensive barrier against foreign agents.

What both of these sources really fail to explore are the underlying factors that led to the GDR being under so much pressure. Despite emigration from the GDR to the FRG being illegal from 1952 onwards, 2.5 million East Germans emigrated to the FRG between 1949 and 1961. The GDR was particularly weakened by this emigration because most of those who left were young, skilled and educated – the very people the GDR was most dependent on for its economic development. Emigration from the GDR threatened to wreck the capacity of the GDR to build up its economic base. The East German government had, therefore, come to the conclusion that the border between East and West should be sealed, but were prevented from doing so by the attitude of the USSR. The Soviet government had consistently refused suggestions from the GDR to completely close the border between East and West Berlin because of fears that it would be seen by the West as a highly provocative action. It was not until 1961 that the crisis facing the GDR due to mass emigration persuaded the USSR that there was no other choice. At a meeting of the Eastern bloc states in Moscow during August 1961, the decision was taken to close East Berlin's border with West Berlin. Thus, the ultimate responsibility for building the Wall was taken by Khrushchev. This is, perhaps, why the Soviet government's statement in Source 15 is rather defensive, stressing to the American government that the Wall was 'temporary'.

Historians could certainly make use of the two sources to aid their investigation into the reasons for the building of the Berlin Wall. They highlight the way in which the government of the GDR presented the Wall as a necessary barrier against the West, but also that the Soviet Union had supported the building of the Wall as the last resort of a desperately unpopular government that was trying to impose socialism under a one-party state on an unwilling population.

This section gives an outline of the views in Source 16 and makes points about how it is different to Source 15, but it does not use own knowledge of the historical context to explore these differences. It would be better if the perspectives in the sources were challenged by using own knowledge. There is some awareness of how the nature and origin of the sources have affected their views, but this is not explored.

This section has a lot of detailed own knowledge, but it is not used effectively to assess the sources. There is a link to Source 15 at the end. It would be better if this link was established at the beginning of the paragraph and developed throughout this section.

This conclusion links the sources to the focus of the question and makes the point that they can be used together to give differing perspectives on the same event. It would be better if the sources were used in a more critical manner, for example by assessing the validity of their views.

Verdict

This is an average answer because:

- it does identify arguments in both sources and illustrates this by close use of the sources, but it does not deal with the content of the sources critically
- it does deploy own knowledge, but this is not used to test the validity of the perspectives given in the sources
- it makes reference to the origin and purpose of the sources, but it does not fully explore how it might affect their validity.

Use the feedback on this answer to rewrite it, making as many improvements as you can.

Paper 2: A Level sample answer with comments

Section A

You will need to read and analyse two sources and use them in tandem to assess how useful they are in investigating an issue. For these questions remember to:

- spend time, up to ten minutes, reading and identifying the arguments and evidence present in the sources; then make a plan to ensure that your response will be rooted in these sources
- use specific references from the sources
- deploy own knowledge to develop points made in the sources and establish appropriate context
- come to a substantiated judgement.

Study Sources 15 and 16 (Chapter 1, page 306) before you answer this question.

How far could the historian make use of Sources 15 and 16 together to investigate the reasons why the Berlin Wall was built? (20 marks)

Strong student answer

Responsibility for the building of the Berlin Wall in August 1961 is generally attributed to the GDR government, a communist dictatorship desperate to protect its own state from collapse. Sources 15 and 16 give the historian two differing perspectives that indicate, while this view has validity, the reality lying behind this action was more complex. Source 15 gives the historian an official view of the Soviet government, trying to justify an event that had caused international condemnation, but much of what it says is supported by the evidence of Source 16, even though it is expressed in a different way and from a different perspective, that of schoolchildren.

The building of the Berlin Wall was an event that provoked a very strong response from the West, who viewed it as an affront to freedom. Their condemnation of the Wall provides the context within which Source 15 was produced. The source is a statement issued by the Soviet government in response to a note it was sent from the American government condemning the action. Source 15 is, therefore, an official statement attempting to justify the actions of the GDR and defend their position. It is in this light that the source can be viewed as propaganda. It places blame for the need to construct the Wall firmly on the West, especially the actions of the FRG. It states how 'West Berlin has been transformed into a centre of subversive activity diversion' and describes these activities as 'political and economic provocations against the GDR'. The reference to the activities of municipal leaders in West Berlin and the 'government organs and concerns of the FRG' make clear that the Soviets are blaming the undermining of the GDR on an organised campaign directed from the West. While this view might be considered propaganda aimed at deflecting responsibility from the actions of the GDR itself, there is some truth in this accusation. Agents from the West were able to infiltrate the GDR from West Berlin and stir up discontent, and politicians from the FRG were keen to contrast the benefits of life under capitalism and liberal democracy with that of the communist dictatorship established in the GDR. Nonetheless, Source 15 is exaggerating the strength of these activities for political effect. This point is confirmed by the evidence of Source 16.

Source 16 describes how the child of a minor official in the GDR government believed that the Berlin Wall was necessary as 'a proper border' and a 'protecting rampart to keep bad people out of the country'. This suggests that those who supported the government were willing to accept the official line that Western agents were undermining the state. Many East Berliners did resent the actions of some in the West, especially those who crossed from West Berlin into the East of the city to purchase cheap, state-subsidised goods with their relatively high wages, while low-paid East Berliners struggled with the resulting shortages. Yet, Anne's view, as the child of government officials, was not shared by all. Source 16 gives us the view of her school friends and these indicate that the Berlin Wall was seen in a negative light by those whose position in the GDR was less privileged. Anne's friends describe the GDR as 'a prison, a lousy dictatorship in which only Red officials thrive'. These views are expressed by children

A strong opening that explains the background of both sources, emphasising that there is a level of agreement between the two sources as well as disagreement. This shows that the sources are being considered together.

This section is effective because it makes use of the origin and purpose of the source to consider the validity of its argument. It also uses own knowledge directly to consider the truth of the views expressed in the source.

This section is effective because it uses own knowledge to consider the claims made in the sources. The answer shows that Source 16 has been read carefully and gives a range of views.

who were probably influenced by what they heard their parents say in their homes. As such, it gives the historian a valuable insight into the views of the general population, which differ from those of government officials. The fact that one of Anne's friends 'shouts' her criticisms of the government suggests a level of anger had built up against the way the GDR government was ruling. This was a reflection of the controls imposed by the government on people's lives that had produced mass emigration from the GDR. It was the sheer level of this migration to the West that had to be stopped if the GDR was not to face economic collapse.

Source 15 makes reference to the issue of migration to West Germany, but instead of blaming the actions of the GDR government for this, it blames it on 'deception, bribery, and blackmail' used by the West. There is some truth in this statement. The FRG had introduced a series of measures to encourage East Germans to flee from communism. East Germans who emigrated to the FRG were automatically entitled to FRG citizenship and received generous financial and housing assistance. Western agents had even been known to enter East Berlin to recruit skilled workers. Once they arrived in the FRG, many GDR citizens who had emigrated claimed they were victims of a repressive regime because it was in their best interests to convince the authorities that they had been persecuted in order to receive higher levels of financial and housing assistance from their new state. Whatever the real causes of migration the consequences were to prove devastating for the GDR. Despite emigration from the GDR to the FRG being illegal from 1952 onwards and classified as 'flight from the Republic', 2.5 million East Germans emigrated to the FRG between the formation of the GDR in 1949 and the building of the Berlin Wall 12 years later. This meant that the population of the GDR actually decreased from 18.5 million in 1949 to just over 17 million in 1961. Furthermore, those that emigrated were mostly young, skilled and educated – the very people the GDR was most dependent on for its economic development. This was clearly unsustainable in economic terms, but it also had political consequences. It allowed the FRG to undermine the GDR's credibility and assert the failings of socialism. The FRG continued to refer to those that had left East Germany as 'refugees' rather than as 'migrants'. For this reason the statement made in Source 16 that the GDR was 'busy saving its own skin' was certainly valid.

This section uses detailed own knowledge of the causes of mass migration to explain the references in the sources. The perspective of Source 15 is assessed by considering how far it can be supported and challenged.

A full picture of the reasons behind the building of the Wall must take into account the role played by the USSR. Source 15 states that 'the Soviet government fully understands and supports the actions of the Government of the German Democratic Republic', but the reality was more complicated than this. Khrushchev, the Soviet leader, had consistently refused suggestions from the SED to completely close the border between East and West Berlin. There were fears that such action would be so provocative that it could lead the West into imposing trade restrictions with the GDR or even escalating into outright military confrontation. Khrushchev wanted to use the status of Berlin as a tool in negotiations with the West. By 1961 this tactic had failed and, as the situation in East Germany reached crisis point, Khrushchev gave permission for the Wall to be erected. At a meeting of the Eastern bloc states in Moscow on 3–5 August 1961, the leaders of the Warsaw Pact, with Khrushchev's support, decided that the only solution to solve emigration from the GDR was to seal the border between East and West Berlin.

This section considers the role of the Soviet Union, especially that of Khrushchev. The reference in Source 15 is discussed and explained by reference to detailed own knowledge.

In conclusion, Sources 15 and 16 provide useful evidence that reflects on the reasons for the building of the Berlin Wall. They both highlight the fact that the GDR was under enormous pressure to ensure its survival. While the official line that mass emigration from the GDR was a product of Western provocation is presented by Source 15, Source 16 highlights that this needs to be put into the context of the actions of a 'lousy dictatorship'. There were sections of the GDR's population that were unconvinced by the official explanation and the historian also needs to be wary of accepting this perspective. Ultimately, the decision to build the Wall could only be taken with Soviet approval, a further sign of the weakness of the GDR.

This conclusion is effective because it makes a relevant judgement that sees how the two sources can be used in combination.

Verdict

This is a strong answer because:

- it makes inferences from the key features of the sources and relates them to the issue
- it uses a sound range of own knowledge to discuss the points raised by the sources
- it assesses the origin and purpose of the sources to consider their validity as evidence.

Paper 2: A Level sample answer with comments

Section B

These questions assess your understanding of the period in some depth. They will ask you about the content you learned about in the four key themes, but may not ask about more than one theme. For these questions remember to:

- give an analytical, not a descriptive, response
- support your points with evidence
- cover the whole time period specified in the question
- come to a substantiated judgement.

To what extent was Honecker successful in his attempts to improve the international prestige of the GDR? (20 marks)

Average student answer

On its creation in 1949 the German Democratic Republic was considered to be a temporary state that would, at some time in the future, reunite with West Germany. The tensions of the Cold War had resulted in the division of Germany and, to the Western powers, the GDR was an artificial state that only existed because of Soviet support. Many politicians in West Germany, especially those on the political right, refused to acknowledge the authority of the East German state. It was against this background that the government of the GDR struggled to gain international prestige.

In order to improve the international prestige of the GDR Honecker took advantage of the opportunities presented by Willy Brandt's policy of Ostpolitik to establish a more meaningful relationship with West Germany. Brandt decided to abandon the Hallstein Doctrine whereby West Germany had refused to acknowledge the existence of East Germany as a separate state. The groundwork for agreement was laid by a series of visits between the leaders of the two German states. In March 1970, Brandt made the first visit by an FRG chancellor to the GDR to Erfurt and a return visit was made by Willi Stoph, the prime minister of the GDR to Kassel in the FRG in May the same year.

Honecker's response to Ostpolitik led to a number of agreements between the FRG and the GDR. The 1971 Four-Power Treaty allowed West Berliners to visit East Berlin and secured Soviet acceptance of this provision. In effect, this made another situation such as the Berlin Blockade impossible and significantly reduced the potential threat of conflict over Berlin. This was followed by the Basic Treaty of 1972 that saw the FRG and GDR both acknowledge the existence of both German states and agree to settle disputes without threatening or using force. The fact that the FRG was willing to acknowledge the GDR was an important step forward for the international position of the GDR. Most Western governments followed the lead of the FRG in their diplomatic relations with East Germany and, therefore, getting the West German government to establish diplomatic relations was important. One sign of improvement was the admission of both German states to the United Nations in 1973 as full members. As a member of the United Nations, Honecker signed the Helsinki Agreement on Human Rights of 1975 – one of 35 countries to do so.

This is a weak introduction because, although it highlights the context within which the GDR had an issue with its international prestige, it does not address whether Honecker was successful in improving this situation. It would be better to start with an assertion that deals directly with the focus of the question.

This section is weak because it does not focus on whether these actions were successful or not. It would be improved by linking phrases, such as 'this led to' or 'as a result', that allow discussion of the extent of improvement in international prestige.

This section is better because it starts to mention the ways in which the agreements improved the international prestige of the GDR. It would be even better if the answer explored the impact of these agreements in more depth, for example, assessing the limits to these agreements.

Diplomacy was, however, only one tool by which the GDR could improve its international prestige. Sport became increasingly important as a means by which East Germany could show the supposed superiority of socialism over capitalism, as well as a means to help reduce the GDR's diplomatic isolation. In the 1964 Tokyo Olympic Games, the FRG and GDR were represented as one all-German team, a process which involved a level of co-operation. Thereafter, each German state entered separate teams in the Olympics and other sporting competitions. The GDR's performance was frequently impressive, especially given its size relative to that of West Germany. In the 1968 Olympic Games, for example, the GDR gained nine gold medals compared to five for West Germany. At the 1980 Moscow Olympics East Germany took 11 of the 13 gold medals available in women's swimming. In athletics the world record for the women's 400 metres was set in 1985 by Marita Koch who ran it in 47.60 seconds. These were achievements that made the rest of the world take notice of the GDR.

This section has good detail and there is some focus on success. It would, again, be better with a more in-depth exploration of the degree of success. The question asks 'to what extent' and this should be assessed, for example: East German sporting achievements were often accompanied by international scepticism and accusations of drug-taking.

Honecker did not only take measures to improve the international prestige of the GDR in the West, he also attempted to improve its status in the Eastern bloc. In 1950, the GDR became a member of COMECON and its economy was tied into the economies of the socialist states. One of the roles performed by COMECON was to organise a degree of centralised planning that encouraged specialisation within the socialist countries. East Germany's role in producing large amounts of manufactured goods reflected the fact that it possessed a sophisticated industrial economy relative to the rest of the Eastern bloc. The GDR supplied the USSR and other COMECON members with vital technology in areas such as chemicals, microelectronics and electrical engineering at well below world market prices. The standard of living of East Germans may have been below that of West Germany, but it was the envy of the rest of the socialist bloc. In fact, the differences were sometimes the cause of tension between the GDR and its socialist neighbours. Exchange controls had to be set up in the 1980s between Poland and Germany as resentment grew from Germans at Poles who crossed into the GDR to buy goods that were unavailable in Poland. A similar measure had to be introduced in Czechoslovakia to prevent Germans buying goods there. Governments of the socialist countries were sometimes influenced more by nationalist sentiments than socialist solidarity. Resentment of the GDR's position within the Eastern bloc was also problematic due to lingering memories of German brutality during the Second World War. This was a particular issue for Poland and Hungary. Declarations of friendship between the governments of the socialist bloc were often little more than propaganda. Changes to the GDR's constitution made in 1968, and again in 1974, declared the GDR to be forever and irrevocably allied with the USSR. A friendship treaty the following year with the USSR bound the GDR even closer.

This is a better paragraph on the prestige of the GDR within the Eastern bloc. It mentions successes and limitations to the prestige of the GDR. The point about international friendship being propaganda could be explored further.

Overall, therefore, Honecker was able to raise the international prestige of the GDR by a range of methods. He made good use of the opportunities offered by Brandt's policy of Ostpolitik to secure diplomatic concessions for the GDR. Sport and trade were other areas where the status and prestige of the GDR was raised. The Trabant car might have been a joke in the West, but for many citizens in the socialist bloc, it was a much sought-after consumer good.

The conclusion is brief and consists largely of repetition of points made in the body of the answer. It would be better to try to develop the overall reasoning in support of the judgement.

Verdict

This is an average answer because:

- it tends to describe the actions of Honecker's government rather than explain and analyse their impact
- it needs greater supporting material
- there is an attempt to reach a judgement, but it is limited in its sophistication and depth.

Use the feedback on this answer to rewrite it, making as many improvements as you can.

Paper 2: A Level sample answer with comments

Section B

These questions assess your understanding of the period in some depth. They will ask you about the content you learned about in the four key themes, but may not ask about more than one theme. For these questions remember to:

- give an analytical, not a descriptive, response
- support your points with evidence
- cover the whole time period specified in the question
- come to a substantiated judgement.

To what extent was Honecker successful in his attempts to improve the international prestige of the GDR? (20 marks)

Strong student answer

On its formation in 1949 East Germany (the GDR) was seen as a temporary state, with German reunification anticipated at some time in the future. The very existence of the GDR was considered fragile, a view reinforced by the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961 to stop the citizens of East Germany fleeing their own country. The Berlin Wall was highly detrimental to the international prestige of the GDR, especially in the West where it was viewed as a cruel and inhumane division erected by a state that could only survive by imprisoning its own population. It was in this context that Honecker, as leader of East Germany, was keen to improve the international prestige of the GDR. Under his leadership relations were developed with both the capitalist and socialist powers, but it was the relationship with West Germany that really mattered in the eyes of the East German government. By the 1980s, Honecker had successfully established diplomatic relations with West Germany, but the international prestige of the GDR was still limited. In 1987, Honecker met the West German chancellor, Helmut Kohl. It was a highly significant meeting of two supposedly equal leaders, but the photographs of the occasion seemed to symbolise the relative prestige of the two states: Kohl at 6 feet 4 inches towered over the much smaller figure of Honecker.

This is a strong start to the answer. The answer is placed within the context of the creation of the GDR and the reasons why international status was an issue for Honecker. A relevant assertion is made that can be argued throughout the answer.

The key to improving the international status of the GDR was West Germany's abandonment of the Hallstein Doctrine. The Doctrine had effectively prevented not just West Germany refusing to establish diplomatic relations with East Germany, but also West Germany's allies from doing the same. This deliberate snub to the GDR could only be overcome by a change in the approach of the West German government. Honecker was able to take advantage of the opportunities presented by Willy Brandt's policy of Ostpolitik between 1969 and 1974. Brandt decided to abandon the Hallstein Doctrine in order to provide a dialogue with the GDR to remove travel restrictions and establish trade links between the two states. The fact that in doing so the West German government was acknowledging the authority of the government of the GDR was a success for Honecker. The impression was given that both governments recognised that the existence of East Germany was likely to be more permanent than previously anticipated. As a result of this rapprochement, the 1971 Four-Power Treaty was signed. It allowed West Berliners to visit East Berlin and secured Soviet acceptance of this provision. This treaty was followed by the Basic Treaty in 1972, which saw the FRG and GDR acknowledge the existence of both German states and agree to settle disputes without threatening or using force. This marked a further improvement in the international standing of the GDR as it opened up the possibility of an ongoing dialogue with the West over points of tension, such as travel restrictions and human rights. This change also had a significant impact on diplomatic relations with other Western powers. Formal diplomatic recognition of the GDR rose from 38 countries in 1972 to 123 by 1978. A further symbol of the growing prestige of the GDR was its admission into the United Nations in 1973. As a consequence of membership, East Germany signed

The answer is effective because there is a strong focus on the question. It considers the degree of success of measures to improve international prestige. The points made are supported with some good information.

the Helsinki Agreement on Human Rights in 1975, taking its place alongside 34 other countries signing this key international agreement. Nonetheless, most Western countries still viewed the GDR as little more than a puppet state of the Soviet Union.

This pattern of superficial success was to be repeated in other areas where attempts to improve the international standing of East Germany were taken, such as through culture and sport. In culture several artists had or gained reputations of international standing. Bertolt Brecht, the dramatist and poet, was highly regarded abroad, but as an artist who grew up during the Nazi period and who was often critical of the GDR government, he could hardly be seen as a product of the East German state. The works of the writer Christa Wolf were also well regarded in the West, but she was also not an uncritical voice on the government of the GDR. In sport, the achievements of the GDR were frequently impressive, especially for a country with a population of less than 19 million. At the 1980 Moscow Olympics East Germany took 11 of the 13 gold medals available in women's swimming. In athletics East Germany came second in the medals table with 11 golds. However, these achievements were seen as less impressive in the light of the US boycott of the Moscow games. Perhaps more damaging to the reputation of the GDR were the accusations made by Western sports commentators that East Germany's achievements were fuelled by illegal performance-enhancing drugs. In other sports the performance of the GDR was sometimes less impressive: the East German football team never reached the heights of the West German team.

This paragraph starts with a clear assertion linked to the overall argument of the answer. The rest of the paragraph is strong because it explores this argument with precise supporting detail.

If the GDR could only achieve superficial success in raising its international prestige with the West, its standing with other countries of the socialist bloc was higher. As a member of COMECON, the organisation that co-ordinated economic support throughout the Eastern bloc, East Germany's role in producing large amounts of manufactured goods reflected the fact that it possessed a sophisticated industrial economy relative to the rest of the Eastern bloc. The GDR supplied the USSR and other COMECON members with vital technology in areas such as chemicals, microelectronics and electrical engineering at well below world market prices. The relative success of the GDR was also evident in the standard of living of most East Germans, which was the envy of the rest of the socialist bloc. Yet these indicators of success were also causes of tension that tended to undermine the international prestige of the GDR within the Eastern bloc. Governments of the socialist countries were sometimes influenced more by nationalist sentiments than socialist solidarity, and attitudes towards the GDR suffered because of lingering memories of German brutality in Eastern Europe during the Second World War. This was a particular issue for Poland and Hungary. Declarations of friendship between the governments of the socialist bloc were often little more than propaganda. The GDR's constitution declared that it was to be forever and irrevocably allied with the USSR, but in 1985 Mikhail Gorbachev, the new Soviet leader, started to pursue policies of reform that made a separate East German state less of a necessity for the USSR. Thus, declarations of friendship were a façade behind which the GDR struggled to gain the international prestige it hoped for.

This paragraph advances the argument by assessing the success of the GDR's prestige in the socialist world.

Honecker's attempts to improve the status of the GDR had produced a range of measures that had given the GDR an appearance of acceptance. Honecker felt he had reached his pinnacle of international success in 1989, when the GDR celebrated its 40th birthday with a large gathering of heads of state from the socialist world. It allowed Honecker to take centre stage as he greeted important visitors such as Gorbachev. Yet it was an outward show of friendship that masked the reality of the international prestige of the GDR: it remained a state unloved by other countries, as well as by much of its own population.

A strong conclusion that draws together the different elements put forward in the argument. The answer recognises that there is evidence for both sides of the debate, but evaluates the evidence to reach a reasoned conclusion.

Verdict

This is a strong answer because:

- it recognises both sides of the case, looking at both successes and limitations, and sustains a focus on the question set
- it has a wide range of evidence that is used to support the points made
- it reaches a secure concluding judgement based on valid criteria for measuring 'success'.

Index

Abgrenzung (demarcation) **318**, 324
Adenauer, Konrad 291–2
Afghanistan, war in 118
agit-prop touring groups **252**
agricultural collectivisation **36**, 46-9, 50, 52, **195**, 196, 298
agriculture in China 171, 192-5, 198, 199, 203
agriculture USSR 55–6, 57, 95, 99
Akhamatova, Anna 82, 83
alcoholism 96, 104, 117, 361
Alliance '90 377
All-Russian Congress of Soviets 16, 17
amateur status **321**
ancestor worship 259-60
Anchee Min 254, 255
Andropov, Yuri 35, 57, 74, 76, 78
anti-Americanism 189, 190
Apel, Erich 313, 314
Applebaum, Anne 78
Aral Sea 123
Architecture 83
Art 82, 256
artists 85, 86
August Coup (1991) 134–5, 135, 136

backyard furnaces 208-9
bad classes **226**
Baltic States 128–9, 130
barefoot doctors 248–9
bartering **38**
Basic Treaty 324, 325
Battle of Stalingrad 91
Beat music **354**, 355
Beria, Lavrenti 31, 73–4
Berlin 286, 289, 291, 308
Berlin accord 324, 331
Berlin Airlift 291
Berlin Crisis (1958) 304–5
Berlin Wall 288, 289, 305–7, 322, 360
  escape attempts 307, 312, 341, 355
  fall of 358, 370–3
Bizonia 290, 291
black marketeer **19**, 38, 57
Bo Yibo (1908–2007) **184**, 220
Bolsheviks 8, 10, 14
Bonaparte 228
'border assailants' 307, 355
border-crossers 303, 312
bourgeois experts **44**
Bourgeosie **11**
Brandenburg Gate **371**
Brandt, Willy 322-4, 329-30
Brecht, Bertolt 299
Brezhnev Doctrine 126, **331**, 332, 363
Brezhnev, Leonid 10, 29, 33–5, 56–7, 67–8, 96
bride price **241**
bureaucracy **18**
bureaucratisation of the revolution **176**

cadres **33, 177**, 182, 208
capitalist roaders 231–2
censorship 64, 345–6
Central People's Government **174**
Centralised Planned Economy **296**
Checkpoint Charlie **371**
Cheka 19, 71
Chen Boda **219**, 229
Chen Yun (1905–90) **207**, 213
Chernenko, Konstantin 34, 35
Chernobyl 122
Chiang Kai-shek 169, 172
China Pictorial 207, 243
Chinese Communist Party (CCP) 168, 169
Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) **173**–4, 175
Chistka **19**, 23
Christian Democratic Union (CDU) 291, 292, 322
Christian missionaries 188, **189**, 257
Christianity 258–9, 348–51
Chronicle of Current Events 77, 78, 79
Church, Protestant (GDR) 348–51
civil war 14, 69, 98
class struggle **286**
Cold War **52**, 291, 347, 363
collectivisation **36**, 46-9, 50, 52, **195**, 196, 298
COMECON **307**, 316, 330–1
Comintern 189
command economy **37**, 42–3, 58, 59
Commissar **28**
Common Program **174**
communes 102, 197–8, 201
communism 11, 127
Communist Party 13, 124
concubinage **242**
Confucianism **240**, 258
Confucius **225**
conservatives 13, 14, 124
Constituent Assembly **12**
constructivists **81**
consumer goods 57, 58, 361, 362
consumer socialism **311**, 315
containment **290**
co-operatives 118, 119, 195–6, 298
corruption 34, 45, 123, 375
Cuban Missile Crisis 32
cult of 'little man' **81**
cult of personality 29, **65**–8
Cultural Revolution
  China 166, 216–38
  USSR **81**
cultural vandalism 226–7
culture in China 251–7
culture in Russia 80–7
Czechoslovakia 127, 315, 330

dams 52, 65, 211
dangan **182**
Dazhai **236**
debt of GDR 316, 360–1, 363
deficit **118**
dekulakisation squads **48**
democracy 180
democratic centralism 16–17, 179-80, **294**
democratisation **123**, 124
demonstrations 359 , 371
Deng Xiaoping 175, 203, 213, 227, 235-6
Deng Yulan **246**
De-Stalinisation 31, 53, **186**, 308
détente 118, **322**
Diary of Lei Feng **222**
dictatorship of proletariat **11**
discontent in USSR 78
disillusionment in GDR 366
dissident 76–7, 78, **362**
divorce 102, 104
Dnepropetrovsk mafia 34
Doctors' Plot 74
domino theory **191**
Dresden 295
drugs for performance 321
Dzerzhinsky, Felix 19, 21

Eastern bloc **288**
Eastern Europe 126–7
Economic System of Socialism (ESS) 311, 313, 314–15, 317
economics, socialist 296–7, 299–302
economy
  China 213
  GDR 315–16, 324, 359–62
  USSR 54, 58–9, 117

education
China 247–8
GDR 337–8
USSR 94–5, 99, 105–12
elections, GDR 293, 377
emancipation 97
European concessions 205
European Economic Community (EEC) 326
exam preparation 139–66, 265–83, 383–401

factory committee 15
family planning, China 245
family unit 102–3, 104
famine
in China 192, 199–203, 244
in Russia 39, 40, 49, 52
Fechter, Peter 381
Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) 286
feudal 11, **241**
films 83, 255, 346, 354, 356
'five antis' 184
'five pests' 189
Five-Year Plan
China **186**, 205–14
GDR 297–8, 360
USSR 43-6, 51–2, 53, 57, 117
food shortages 48
foot binding 241
Forbidden City 226
forced labour 52, 74, 91
Four Modernisations **235**, 248
'four olds' 224, 225–6, 253
Four Powers' Agreement 324, 331
Free German Youth (FDJ) 343–4
Fritz, Oliver 319, 353, 362

Gang of Four **217**, 226, 236, 237
Gao Gang (1905–54) 185
Georgia 128, 129
German Democratic Republic (GDR) 286, 288–9, 292, 306–7, 311, 364
identity 321, 331
living standards 304, 334
and USSR 308, 316, 331–2
Western influences 351–2, 354–6
German Social Democratic Party (SPD) 289
Glasnost **122**, 125, 131, **363**, 364
go into deficit 118
Gorbachev, Mikhail 9, 114, 358, 363, 364, 368–9
limitations 131–2
reforms 117–18, 119–20, 121–5, 133
and USSR collapse 131–3
Gosplan 28
GPU (State Political Administration) **71**
Great Leap Forward 166, 192, 197, 201, 203, 207, 211
Great Patriotic War 9
Great Purges **23**, 69
'Great Retreat' 102–3, 109
Great Terror 25, 183–4, 188
Grenzverletzer **307**, 355
gross national product (GNP) 314
Grundschule **337**
Gueffroy, Chris 382
Guillaume Affair 324
Gulag 22, **44**, 46, 51, 71–3, 75, 84

hagiography 66
Hallstein Doctrine 322
Han 181
health care
China 248–51
GDR 339–40, 361
USSR 92, 95
Helsinki Accords **76, 328**, 350
high culture 81
historians 116, 374
historiographical approaches 131
holodomor 50
Honecker, Erich 311, 317, 346, 368, 369, 370
Honecker, Margot 337, 339
Horn, Dr Joshua 249
housing 91–2, 95, 335–6, 360
Hu Feng (1902–85) 186
Hua Guofeng (1921–2008) 237
Hungary 127
Hungary/Austrian border 366, 367
hyperinflation 171

ideologue 218
IM (Informal Member) **341**, 342
industrial developments 44–5, 52, 54, 297–8, 315, 361
Industrial Revolution **8**, 10
informers 72, 381
Intershops 315 , 375
Irish Republican Army (IRA) 341
Iron Curtain 326
Islam 69–70, 98, 259

Japanese war with China 171–2
Jews 77
Jiang Qing **219**, 225, 254–6
Jugendweihe **338**, 348, 349
June Uprising 299–301
Jung Chang 194, 203, 234, 257
Junge Gemeinden 349
Junker 298

Kang Sheng **219**, 220
Katyn Massacre 123
Kennedy, President 32, 304, 305, 308
KGB **74**, 76
Khrushchev, Nikita 31, 56, 67, 304, 308
Kirov 23, 28, 74
Kohl, Helmut 363, 375, 377, 378, 379
Kollontai, Alexandra 98, 100
Komsomol (Young Communist League) **81**, 111
Korean War 188–91
Krenz, Egon 366, 370–1
Kronstadt Mutiny **15**, 40
kulak **28**, 48

labour camps 44–5, 71
Land Decree 37, 48
land reform 14, 192–5, 298
Länderkammer (States Chamber) 293–4
laogai system 185
Left Opposition 23
legislature 174
Leipzig 364, 368, 369
Lenin, Vladmir 8, 13, 17–18, 20–2, 66, 71
government 15-19, 90–1
Li Fuchun 203
Li Zhisui, Dr 184, **201**–2, 209, 230, 236–7, 260
liberals 124
Liberman Plan 54
light industry **53**–4
Lin Biao 175, **219**, 227–8, 229, 230
literacy 108–9, 247
Literature 82, 84
Lithuania 128
Little Red Book **222**
Liu Shaoqi 203, 213, 227
loans to GDR from FRG 326
Luo Ruiqing (1906–78) 183
Lushan Conference 212
Lysenkoism 110, 199, 201

magazines 64, 312
mandarins 219
Mao Zedong 170, 178–9, 202, 220–1, 236–7, 261–3
assassination attempt 229
and young people 222–3, 224
maps 115, 173, 200, 287
market mechanism 118
marriage law 241–3, 245, 246
Marshall Plan 290
Marx, Karl 8, 116
Marxist theory 219
Marx's ideas **8**, 11
May 1919 Movement 252
McElvoy, Anne 321, 374
media 63–4, 125, 318–19
Mensheviks 12, 13, 41

Mielke, Erich 341, 342, 343
migration 297, 302–3, 312, 367, 368, 376
military-industrial complex **55**, 59
Ministry for State Security (Stasi) **288**, 303, 321, 341–3, 376
mir **40**
moonlighting **94**
mullah **69**
music 83, 84, 85, 354–5

Nagorno-Karabakh 128, 132
nationalisation 37, 38, **297**, 315
nationalism 126, 128, 129-30
Nationalist Party (Guomindang (GMD)) 168, 169, 180, 181
NATO **291**
Nazis 289, 299
Nazi-Soviet Pact 128, 130
Nepmen **40**, 42, 44
nepotism **94**
Neues Deutschland 289, 321
New Economic Policy (NEP) **9**, 39, 40–2, 43, **195**
New Economic System (NES) 311, 313–14, 317
New Forum **368**, 369, 375
new Soviet man **80**
newspapers 63, 64, 289, 318
niche society **347**, 356
NKVD (secret police) 22, 71–4
nomenklatura system **18**, 94
November 1917 (October Revolution) **8**, 10, 12
nuclear 32, 63, 213, 297, 331

October Revolution 8, 10, 12
OGPU (Unified State Political Administration) **19**, 48
oligarchy **34**
Olympic Games 100, 118, 320
OPEC **311**, 315, 316
opera in China 254–5
Operation Rose 305, 312
opium of the masses 68
Ostpolitik 322–4, 326, 352–3

Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) **341**
Pasternak, Boris 79, 82, 83, 84–5
patriarchal **240**
Peaceful Co-existence **308**
peasant associations **195**
Peng Dehuai 175, **199**, 204
People's Daily **247**, 252
People's Enterprise (VEB) **297**
People's Liberation Army (PLA) 177–8, 226, 233
perestroika 118, 119, **363**
personality cult **222**, 295
Pinyin 247
Plattenbau **336**
pluralism **124**
poets 82, 83, 84, 86, 243
Poland 95, 126–7, 330, 363
Politburo
  China **174**
  GDR 293, 294, 295, 371
  USSR 16, 17, 21, 27
political commissar **174**
polygamy **70, 242**
population growth 171, 245
poster campaigns 220, 222–3
Prague Spring **330**
Pravda 63
prefabricated **335**
presidium 31, 33
Production Co-operative **298**
Prolekult 81
proletarian **251**
Proletariat **11**
propaganda 63, 64, 65, 345, 346, 364
proportional representation **293**
protest groups 96, 368, 369
Protestant Church 365
punk **354**, 355
purges 19, 22–5, 230, 231–2

Qing dynasty 168

rabfak **107**, 108
radio 64, 318, 354
Ramadan **70**
Rao Shushi (1903–75) **183**
rationing 39, 119
Rectification Campaign **178**
Red Army Faction 14, 25, **341**
Red Guard **216**, 220–2, 224–6, 252–3
Red Terror 19, 69, 71
Reds **14**
refuseniks 77
religion 68–70, 257–60, 348–51
religious dissidents 77
reparations 51, 289, 290, 296
reunification campaigns, China 181
reunification of GDR and FRG 375, 377, 379–80
  allies' attitude 377
revisionism **213**
Right Opposition **22**
Rightist **187**
Romania 127
Round Table **375**, 377
Ruhr **296**
Russian Orthodox Church 68, 69, 105
Russification **107**
rustication programme **234**

salinisation **211**
satellite state **95**
scientists 76, 77, 112
scorched earth **171**
Seige of Leningrad 91
Seven-Year Plans 53, 54, 298
sexuality in GDR 339
sharia law **69**
Short, Philip 187, 224, 228
show trial **23**–4, 44, 71
Sino-Soviet split **212**
Sino-Soviet Treaty 189, 205
SMERSH **73**
Social Revolutionaries (SRs) 12, 13
social security 89–93, 95
social welfare, GDR 339–40
Socialism in One Country **22, 43**
Socialist Education Movement **218**, 219
socialist legality **31**
Socialist Unity Party (SED) 289, 290, 294, 295, 296, 310
  decline 365–6, 367, 369, 371, 375
  purge of 300
solidarity **363**
Solzhenitsyn, Alexander 76, 77, 84, 86
Soviet Constitution 28
Soviet Union **8**, 9
soviets 17
Sovnarkom 15–16, 17
sport in GDR 100, 319–21
sputnik 54, **197**, 198
Stalin, Josef 30, 65, 66–7, 74–5, 288–9, 292
  opponents 21, 22, 23, 28
  power 21, 27, 28–9
Stalinallee **299**
'Star Wars' 118, 133
Stasi **288**, 303, 321, 341–3, 376
state capitalism **37**
state visits 32, 304, 305, 308, 329–30, 363
state-owned enterprises (SOEs) 209–10
steel campaign 208–9
Stoph, Willi 323, 329-30
Strategic Defence Initiative **118**
strikes 38, 96, 299, 361, 377
struggle sessions **179**, 186
suicide 23, 24, 28, 82, 185, 350
superindustrialisers **44**
supply and demand 54, **57**

Tambov Rising **15**, 40
Tao Zhu (1908-69) **183**
television 64, 318, 354

terror in China 180–1, 182–4, 188, 222, 226
terror in USSR 9, 10, 22–3, 25, 75
terrorist groups 341
Thatcher, Margaret 378
Third Reich 289
thought reform 186
'three antis' 184
Tiananmen Incident 236
Tiananmen Square Massacre 168, **212**, **369**
Tibet 181, 199, 257–8
Trabant 316, 362, 371
trade, GDR with FRG 362, 363
trade union 15, 19, 92
travel, GDR 325, 352–3, 362
Treaty of Brest-Litovsk 13–14
Treaty of Moscow 324
Treaty of Warsaw 324
triad 182
Trotsky, Leon 14, 21, 22, 25
Truman Doctrine 290
trust in cadres 33
Tsarist regime 8, 10
Two-Plus-Four Treaty 377

Ulbricht Group 289
Ulbricht, Walter 289, 292, 294–5, 317
UN Declaration on Human Rights 76
underground group 354
underground newsletter 77, 78, 79
United Front 169, 195
United Nations 328
USSR 8, 18, 51, 114–15, 117, 126–7
centralisation of power 17–19
support to China 205
utopian socialism 198

Virgin Lands Scheme 53, 55, 56
Volga-Don Canal 52
Volkskammer (People's Chamber) 293, 375, 377

walking on two legs 197
wall poster campaign 220
Wang Hongwen 235, 237
War Communism 38-9, 40
warlordism 236
Warsaw Pact 301, 315
welfare system (GDR) 335, 361
White Sea Canal 45, 52, 71
Whites 8, **14**
women's role 97–101, 103, 240–7, 339
women's sport 100, 320, 321
work points 243
World War I 13, 14
World War II 51, 288
writers 62, 76, 77, 86, 345, 346

Yagoda 71–2, 74
Yeltsin, Boris 9, 114, 124, 133, 136, 137
and USSR collapse 134, 135
Yezhov 72–3, 74, 75, 76
youth groups 111–12, 349
yuan 185

Zhenotdel 98
Zhou Enlai 175, 189, 235, 236
Zinonviev, Grigory 21, 22, 24

Acknowledgements

The authors and publisher would like to thank the following individuals and organisations for permission to reproduce photographs and text in this book.

Photographs

(Key: b-bottom; c-centre; l-left; r-right; t-top)

123RF.com: totalpics 287, 288; **akg-images Ltd:** 49, 256, picture-alliance / dpa 380, RIA Nowosti 37, 47, 55, Russian Picture Service 50; **Alamy Images:** National Geographic Image Collection 6, Ryhor Bruyeu 89, 101; **Bridgeman Art Library Ltd:** Pictures From History 208; **Corbis:** Peter Turnley 119; **DK Images:** Andy Crawford 82; **Getty Images:** AFP / Andrey Solovyov 129, AFP / Diane-Lu Hovasse 136, Buyenlarge 62tr, 65, 111, Chris Niedenthal / The LIFE Images Collection 369, Dario Mitidieri 334, 336, Fine Art Images / Heritage Images 10tl, 17, Gerard Malie / AFP 359b, 372, Getty / AFP / PIKO 133, Margaret Bourke-White / The LIFE Images Collection 45, Paul Popper / Popperfoto 169, PhotoQuest 300, Popperfoto 316, Ralph Crane / The LIFE Picture Collection 295, Robert Lackenbach / Time Life Pictures 306, 310, Rolls Press / Popperfoto 285, Sovfoto / UIG 85, 92, 210, 221, 344, Sovfoto / UIG 85, 92, 210, 221, 344, Tom Stoddart 359t, Tony Duffy 320, Topical Press Agency 41, Universal History Archive / UIG 99, Walter Sanders / Life Magazine / The LIFE Picture Collection 286, 291; **International Institute of Social History, Netherlands / IISH:** 176, 190, 242, 244; **Magnum Photos Ltd:** Ferdinando Scianna 10br, 32; **Mary Evans Picture Library:** Epic 62bl, 72, Epic / PVDE 217, Everett Collection 194, 231; **OSTKREUZ - Agentur der Fotografen GmbH:** Harald Hauswald 355; **Randall Bytwerk:** 312; **Shutterstock.com:** chinahbzyg 167; **Stadtgeschichtliches Museum Leipzig:** 345; **TopFoto:** ITAR-TASS 15; **U.S. National Library of Medicine:** History of Medicine Division 250

Cover images: *Front:* **akg-images Ltd:** VISIOARS

All other images © Pearson Education

Figures

Figure 2.1 p.200 from *Access to History: The People's Republic of China 1949–76 2nd edition* by Michael Lynch, Hodder & Stoughton, 2008, p.61

Tables

Tables pp.42, 46, 49, 54, 118 from *An Economic History of the USSR 1917–91* by Alec Nove, (Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, 1969, third edition, 1992). Copyright © Alec Nove, 1969, 1972, 1976, 1982, 1989, 1992; table p.201 from *The Impact of Chairman Mao: China 1946–76* by Robert Whitfield, Oxford University Press, 2008, p.66; tables pp.206, 211 from *Access To History: The People's Republic of China 1949–76 2nd edition* by Michael Lynch, Hodder & Stoughton, 2008, p.59; tables pp.297, 298 from *Democracy and Dictatorship in Germany* by Geoff Layton, Hodder & Stoughton, 2009, p.361; table p.303 from *Germany Divided and Reunited 1945–91* by Nigel Bushnell and Angela Leonard, Hodder & Stoughton, 2009, p.60; table p.320 from *The 1976 Olympic Games*, IOC, International Olympic Committee, 1976

Text

Extracts pp.12, 35, 125, 132 from *The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Empire* by Dmitri Volkogonov, HarperCollins Publishers Limited, 1998, p.434; extract p.24 from *The Black Book of Communism* by Stephane Courtois et al, Harvard University Press, 1999, p.750; extract p.30 from *Khrushchev Remembers* by Nikita Khrushchev, Sphere, 1971. Reproduced by permission of Carlton Books; extracts pp.34, 40 from *Endurance and Endeavour* by J. Westwood, Oxford University Press, 1981; extract p.44 from *The Soviet Union: 1917–1991* by M. McCauley, Taylor & Francis Books UK, 1993; extracts p.50, 54, 118 from *An Economic History of the USSR 1917–91* by Alec Nove, (Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, 1969, third edition, 1992). Copyright © Alec Nove, 1969, 1972, 1976, 1982, 1989, 1992; extract p.73 from *Stalin's Instruments of Terror* by Rupert Butler, History Press, 2006. Reproduced by permission of Amber Books; extract p.75 from *Beria, My Father* by Sergio Beria, Duckworth Publishers and Co. Ltd, 1999; extracts pp.75, 78 from *Gulag: A History of the Soviet Camps* by Anne Applebaum, first published in the USA by Random House Inc., first published in Great Britain by Allen Lane, 2003, Penguin Books, 2004 © Anne Applebaum, Penguin Random House UK and Penguin Random House USA, 2003, p.495; extract p.76 from *Molotov Remembers* by Ivan R. Dee, Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, 1993, pp.261–262; extract p.84 from *Russian Popular Culture* by Richard Stites, Cambridge University Press, 1992, p.124; extracts p.98, 102, 104 from 'Communist Morality in the Sphere of Marital Relations' in *Selected Writings* by Alexandra Kollontai, (Alix Holt, translator), Lawrence Hill Books, 1977. Reproduced by permission of Chicago Review Press and Alix Holt; extracts pp.104, 111 from *Moscow Women* by Carola Hansson and Karen Liden, Allison & Busby, 1983, p.59. Reproduced by permission of Carola Hansson; extract p.109 from *Inside Soviet Schools* by Susan Jacoby © 1974, 1988 by Susan Jacoby, Schocken, p.213. Reproduced by permission of Georges Borchardt, Inc. on behalf of the author; extract p.112 from *A History of Twentieth-Century Russia* by Robert Service, published by Allen Lane, 1997, Penguin Books 1998,

2003, 2009, p.410 © Robert Service 1997, 2003, 2009, Penguin Books; extract p.112 from *A History of the Soviet Union* by G. Hosking, 1992, pp.374–7. Reproduced by permission of HarperCollins Publishers Limited and David Higham Associates; extracts pp.120, 150, 151, 152 from *The Rise and Fall of Communism* by Archie Brown, Bodley Head, 2009, p.583. Reproduced by permission of The Random House Group Limited and HarperCollins USA; extracts pp.120, 149, 151, 152 from *The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Economy* by Philip Hanson, Taylor & Francis Books UK, 2003, p.187; extracts pp.121, 132 from *Causes of the Collapse of the USSR* by Alexander Dallin from *Post-Soviet Affairs* vol. 8(4) 1992. Reproduced by permission of Taylor & Francis Books UK; extract p.121 from *A World Divided* by S. Phillips, Pearson Education Limited, 2009, pp.176–7; extract p.125 from *Revolutionary Russia: 1891–1991* by Orlando Figes, published by Pelican Books, 2009. Copyright © Orlando Figes, 2009. Reproduced by permission of Penguin Books UK and Penguin Random House USA and Henry Holt and Company LLC; extract pp.130, 165 from *The Collapse of the Soviet Union 1985–1991* by David Marples, Taylor & Francis Books UK, 2004, pp.103–4; extract p.130 from *The Fall of Soviet Communism* by Jeremy Smith, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, p.108; extract p.133 'Evaluating Gorbachev and Yeltsin as Leaders' by George W. Breslauer *in Gorbachev, Yeltsin, & Putin: Political Leadership in Russia's Transition* (Carnegie Endowment Series) by Archie Brown (Editor), Lilia Shevtsova (Editor), (Washington, DC; Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Carnegie Endowment Books, 2001, www.carnegieendowment.org); extract p.135 from *A History of the Soviet Union from the Beginning to the End* by Peter Kenez, Cambridge University Press, 2006; extract p.137 from *An Interpretation of Boris Yeltsin* by Vitaly Tretyakov, 2006. Reproduced by permission of the author; extract pp.98, 144 from *A People's Tragedy* by Orlando Figes, published by Jonathan Cape, 1997, p.197. Reproduced by permission of The Random House Group Ltd and the author c/o Rogers, Coleridge & White Ltd., 20 Powis Mews, London W11 1JN; extracts on various pages from *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung*, 1st ed., Mao Tse-Tung, Foreign Language Press, 1949; extract p.184 from *Black Country to Red China* by Esther Cheo Ying, Vintage, 2009, p.96. Reproduced by permission of The Random House Group Limited; extracts pp.184, 202, 209, 230, 260, from *The Private Life of Chairman Mao* by Zhisui Li, Chatto & Windus, 1996, p.388-89. Reproduced by permission of The Random House Group Limited; extract p.186 from *Eighteen Layers of Hell: stories from the Chinese Gulag* by Kate Saunders, published by Continuum, 1996. Reproduced by permission of Bloomsbury Publishing Group Plc.; extracts pp.187, 193, 195, 224, 228, from *Mao: A Life* by Phillip Short, Hodder & Stoughton, 1999, pp.370–1; extract p.188 from *The Tragedy of Liberation* by Frank Dikotter, Bloomsbury Publishing Group Plc., 2013, pp.282–92; extract p.200 from *Hungry Ghosts* by Jasper Becker, John Murray, 1996, p.212. Reproduced by permission of the author; extracts pp.203, 257, from *Mao: The Unknown Story* by Jung Chang and Jon Halliday, published by Jonathan Cape, 2012, p.456–7. Reproduced by permission of The Random House Group Limited; extract p.203 from *The Chinese Road to Socialism* by E. L. Wheelwright and Bruce McFarlane, Monthly Review Press, 1973, p.55; extract p.209 from *The Dragon's Pearl – Growing up among Mao's reclusive circle* by Sirin Phathanothai, published by Simon & Schuster, 1994. Reproduced by permission of Georges Borchardt, Inc.; extract p.224 from *Hostage in Peking* by Anthony Grey, published by Michael Joseph, 1970. Reproduced by permission of Peters Fraser & Dunlop on behalf of the author; extracts pp.225, 229, 253, 255 from *Life and Death in Shanghai* by Nien Cheng published by Grafton, 1986, pp.82–3. Reproduced by permission of HarperCollins Publishers Limited and Grove Atlantic; extract p.234 from *Wild Swans* by Jung Chang and Jon Halliday, published by Flamingo, 1992, p.564. Reproduced by permission of HarperCollins Publishers Ltd and Aitken Alexander Associates; extracts pp.234, 245, 255 from *Cooked Seed* by Anchee Min, Bloomsbury Publishing Group Plc., 2013, p.12; extract p.249 from *Health Care in China* by Joshua Horn, 1976. Reproduced by permission of The Society for Anglo-Chinese Understanding; extract p.254 from *Red Azalea* by Anchee Min, Bloomsbury Publishing Group Plc., 1994; personal interview p.290 between Helga Gottesbühren and Nigel Bushnell. Reproduced by permission of Helga Gottesbühren; extract p.292 from *The Lesser Evil: The Diaries of Victor Klemperer* by Victor Klemperer, published by Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1995, p.301. Reproduced by permission of Aufbau Verlag; extract p.299 from *The German Democratic Republic* by Peter Greider, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, p.49; extract p.303 from Macht Berlin zur Haupstadt des Friedens by Walter Ulbricht, *Neues Deutschland*, May 23 1957; extract p.304 from *The German Democratic Republic: Moscow's German Ally* by David Childs, Taylor & Francis Books UK, 2014, p.213; extract p.305 from *The Berlin Crisis of 1961: Soviet-American Relations and the Struggle for Power in the Kremlin, June–November, 1961* by Robert M. Slusser, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973; extract p.306 from *Red Love* by Maxim Leo, Pushkin Press, 2013, pp.31–2; extracts pp.311, 319, 353, 361 from *Iron Curtain Kid* by Oliver Fritz, www.ironcurtainkid.com. Reproduced by permission of the author; personal interview p.319 between Regina Glasel and Nigel Bushnell. Reproduced by permission of Regina Glasel; personal interview p.321 Reiner Oschmann. Reproduced by permission of Reiner Oschmann; extract p.329 from *Germany Divided and Reunited 1945–91* by Nigel Bushnell and Angela Leonard, Hodder & Stoughton, 2009, p.60; extract p.330 from *The Cold War: A New History* by John Lewis Gaddis, Penguin Press, an imprint of Penguin Publishing Group, a division of Penguin Random House LLC, 2005, p.213; extract p.330 from *The Rise and Fall of the German Democratic Republic* by M. Dennis, Taylor & Francis Books UK, 2000; extract p.339 from *The Socialist Modern* by K. Pence and P. Betts, University of Michigan Press, 2007, p.87; extract p.342 from *Stasiland* by Anna Funder, Granta, 2003, pp.200–1. Reproduced by permission of Granta, The Text Publishing Co. Australia, The Wylie Group UK and HarperCollins USA; extract p.343 from Mit hoher Verantwortung fur den zuverlassigen schutz des socialismusby by E. Mielke, translated and appeared in *Sites of the East German Dictatorship* by H. Knab, 2003, p.10. Reproduced by permission of Jaron Verlag GmbH; personal interview p.338 between Sylvia Gabriel and Nigel Bushnell. Reproduced by permission of Sylvia Gabriel; personal interview p.344 between Gregor Kinast and Nigel Bushnell. Reproduced by permission of Gregor Kinast; extract p.350 titled Konstruktives, freimütiges Gespräch beim Vorsitzenden des Staatsrates, *Neues Deutschland,* 7 March 1978 translated by our author. Reproduced by permission of Neues Deutschland; extract p.362 from *Anatomy of a*

Dictatorship: Inside the GDR 1949–1989 by Mary Fulbrook, Oxford University Press, 1995, pp.147–8; extract p.364 from Durchsichtige 'Ratschlage' (Transparent Advice) by Gunter Herlt, Was und Wie 5/1988, pp.7–9. Reproduced by permission of Randall Bytwerk from http://research.calvin.edu/german-propaganda-archive/herlt.htm; extracts pp.368, 379 from *Uniting Germany: Documents and Debates 1944–1993* by K. Jarausch and V. Gransow, Berghahn Books, 1997; personal interview p.373 between Brigitte Tismer and Nigel Bushnell. Reproduced by permission of Brigitte Tismer; extract p.376 from Hans Modrow's Government Programme, *Neues Deutschland,* 17 November 1989. Reproduced by permission of Neues Deutschland; extract p.376 from Attack on Stasi Headquarters by Hans Modrow, *Neues Deutschland,* 16 January 1990. Reproduced by permission of Neues Deutschland; extract p.378 from *The Downing Street Years* by Margaret Thatcher, HarperCollins UK, 1993, p.792; extract p.379 from 'VERBATIM III' by Jacques Attali © LIBRAIRIE ARTHEME FAYARD, 1995, p.337.

Every effort has been made to contact copyright holders of material reproduced in this book. Any omissions will be rectified in subsequent printings if notice is given to the publishers.