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Period 2

**Compare and contrast the political and economic policies of Joseph Stalin in the period before the Second World War and those of Mikhail Gorbachev (1985-1991). (AP question 2000 # 2)**

Between Joseph Stalin and Mikhail Gorbachev's political and economic policies the Soviet Union underwent tremendous changes. Though Stalin was more of a Marxist-Leninist communist while Gorbachev was more of a revisionist, both brought great changes upon the Soviet Union. Though Stalin brought about many changes in the period before the Second World War, Gorbachev brought about changes in the troubling days of the mid 80's and the early 90's. These changes altered the lives of every Soviet citizen. In 1924 with the death of Lenin, Stalin came to power. The first thing that Stalin felt he had to do is get rid of all opposition, which included the death of Leon Trotsky, the leader of the Petrograd Soviet. Most old Bolsheviks were out to death by the Great Purges from 1934-1938. Throughout his years Stalin instituted many purges in which he killed of his opposition. Russia was a very backward country compared to the rest of Europe, and Stalin realized that if communism was to survive then it had to modernize quickly. A series of five-year plans were introduced with the aim of rapidly increasing Russia's industrial production. Though the plans did not always achieve the targets that had been set, it is undoubtedly the case that Russia's industrial capacity grew enormously as a result. By 1940 Russia had overtaken Britain in production of iron and steel. Under Stalin the Supreme Soviet (Parliament) was more of a rubber stamp than a functional government. Stalin also had a secret police that was instituted to kill of the people that were against Stalin's reforms. Under Gorbachev's rule things were different. He was sympathetic and encouraged openness (glasnost) and the freedom of speech unlike Stalin who killed all those who spoke against him. Gorbachev hoped that by allowing the citizens more freedom, he could reform and strengthen the Soviet economic system through his policy of perestroika. His glasnost policies allowed for freedom of the press in the Soviet Union. People were allowed to criticize the government without fear of persecution or being put into forced labor camps. Gorbachev allowed the first open Soviet elections, which allowed people to select their own local leaders beginning in 1989

## **I. Joseph Stalin**

### **A. Background**

1. Born Iosif Vissarionovich Dzhughashvili on 21 December 1879 in Gori, Georgia, in the then Russian Empire

2. He was born to a poor peasant family, he was the fourth born and all his brothers and sisters before him died.

## **B. Economic**

1. **Five Year Plans**
  - a. The first five-year plan was instituted mainly to build up the heavy industry or capital wealth of the U.S.S.R.
  - b. Industrialize without the use of foreign loans.
  - c. All three five year plans had two goals, to industrialize and the Collectivization of Agriculture.
  - d. Because Russia's industry was not very high, it was put in strict and close examination.
  - e. The second goal that Stalin had was to control the output of all agriculture. He wanted the government to be in control.
  - f. Under the five-year plans Stalin introduced new technology, such as, better plows, tractors and other improved farming methods.
2. **New Economic Policy (NEP)**
  - a. The NEP was introduced in March 1921 after a series of peasant revolts. Aimed at re-establishing an alliance with the peasantry.
  - b. It began as an agricultural measure to act as an incentive for peasants to produce more food. The policy was ended in 1928 by Stalin's first five-year plan, which began the collectivization of agriculture.

## **C. Political**

1. **The Great Terror**
  - a. The great terror was started in 1934 and it ended in 1938, During these years numerous innocent people were viciously murdered.
  - b. The great terror purged 40,000 army officers that were suspected of treason.
  - c. Stalin was very suspicious of everyone around him; he even went as far as killing one of his friends Serge Kirov. He also killed Trotsky, who was the leader of the Leningrad party.
  - d. Killed many peasants that spoke out against him, Gorbachev however encouraged the freedom of speech through glasnost.
2. **Government**
  - a. Was more of a rubber stamp than a real functional government.
  - b. Gosplan- was the part of the government that determined the quota necessary for each business and farmer to accomplish.
  - c. Supreme Soviets- (parliament) was the apex of the soviet power.
  - d. Politburo- Dozen of people that controlled the personnel and the policies of the government.

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3. The use of propaganda
  - a. Stalin did not allow any works to be published unless the government censored it. So therefore Stalin used censorship to prevent rebellion.
  - b. Stalin glorified the Soviets in poster, newspapers, banners etc.

## II. Mikhail Sergeevich Gorbachev

### A. Background

1. Born on March 2, 1931, in Privolnoye, Russia.
2. Parents were peasants
3. Gorbachev won the Nobel peace prize for his leading role in ending the Cold war and promoting disarmament

### B. Economic

1. The first set of reform policies were designed to transform and restructure the economy
2. There were many problems going on at this time, problems that were made public once Gorbachev came to power.
  - a. Corruption, poverty, crime, drugs alcoholism shortage of housing and consumer goods.
3. The economy was failing to meet the needs of the Soviet population and was falling behind that of the west.
4. Gorbachev instituted *perestroika* in 1986
  - a. Perestroika- drastic modification of the planned command economy that was inherited from Stalin and that was carried forward with only minor changes.
  - b. Perestroika- fundamental economic restructuring.
  - c. Through perestroika Gorbachev instituted freer prices, more independence for the state enterprises, and the setting of profit-seeking private corporations to provide personal services for consumers.
5. In 1985 Gorbachev allowed farmers and farm families to work with state collective farms on a sharecrop basis or they could farm their own land.
6. Within a few years Gorbachev finally realized that perestroika was not far-reaching enough and in he formed new regulations in 1988.
  - a. The state enterprises would be held under strict accountability
  - b. Now for the first time since Lenin started his NEP, people were actually encouraged to start their own business or to form corporations. They were even encouraged to hire workers.
7. Now Eastern Europe was ready to go their separate way
  - a. In 1988 Hungary had a revolution in which the communist party was destroyed.

- b. On November 9, 1989 the East German government took opened the Berlin Wall, which symbolized the freedom that was to come ahead.
  - c. Then by 1991 the USSR had been destroyed and the Russian flag was replaced.
8. Even with these new reforms, things were still the same, and there were no benefits for the consumer.
  9. In 1990 the economic initiatives had met very little success and that posed a problem to his leadership and the entire reform program.

### C. Political

1. Now that perestroika failed Gorbachev decided to pursue it on a political level, by this he introduced his policy of glasnost
  - a. Glasnost- means open – ness
  - b. This allowed the people to speak freely; it also allowed the citizens outside of the bureaucracy to be free to speak in order to help solve economic and political problems.
  - c. Later Gorbachev allowed free debates and was moving toward freer elections.
  - d. Glasnost also let to an end to the decades of totalitarianism control over cultural, political and intellectual life.
  - e. Soviet Jews, who at one point had been refused permission to leave the country, were now permitted to leave.
2. In 1987 Gorbachev spoke openly of Stalin's enormous and unforgettable crimes.
3. In March of 1989 elections were held.
  - a. There was now an elected Congress of People's Deputies that held 2,250 seats. They then chose a smaller legislative body, which was a new Supreme Soviet with 542 members.
  - b. The legislation had the power to initiate legislature of all kinds, and also the power to freely debate issues.
4. Now that Gorbachev was in power things were beginning to change Gorbachev improved relations with U.S. President Ronald Reagan, with whom he signed an Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) arms limitation treaty in 1987.
  - a. By this they both agreed to remove the land-based intermediate-range missiles they both had in Europe.
5. By 1989 he had brought about the end of the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan.

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In these different time periods both Stalin and Gorbachev made tremendous changes to the Soviet Union. Both Gorbachev and Stalin are part of a long chain of rulers

that sought to imitate western industry, policy and culture. Stalin's reign came about right after Lenin's death, this led to the rise of Stalin's totalitarian dictatorship. Stalin used the help of the secret police to get rid of his opposition. He also got rid of everyone that spoke out against him. Gorbachev recognized that the country faced many problems. He sought to retain the socialist economic structure of the country, while introducing reforms, which he believed, would revitalize the economy. Gorbachev's policies of glasnost (openness) and perestroika (economic reform) led eventually to the demise of the Soviet Union. On December 25, 1991 Gorbachev resigned as President and the Soviet Union officially dissolved. Although Gorbachev failed to improve the social and economic problems within the Soviet Union, he will be remembered as the man who ended the cold war. Stalin tried with his five year plans while Gorbachev instituted glasnost and perestroika. Both of these rulers brought changes that are still remembered to this day.

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