

IB History HL

Internal Assessment

To what extent were Lenin's efforts to emancipate women maintained by Stalin in the years 1929-1939?

Word count: 2200

Section 1: Identification and Evaluation of sources

This investigation will explore the question 'To what extent were Lenin's efforts to emancipate women maintained by Stalin in the years 1929-1939?'. An extract from the book 'The Soviet Experiment' by Ronald Suny (see Appendix 1) is relevant to this investigation as it discusses the negative effects of Stalin's domestic policies on women. A propaganda poster drawn by Soviet artist Grigory Shegal in 1931 (see Appendix 2) presents a different perspective on the topic of women's emancipation, conveying a message from the government, and is thus pertinent to this investigation. Shegal's poster demonstrates how women's emancipation, initiated by Lenin, was intended to be followed by Stalin, thus contrasting with Suny's contention that Stalin did not maintain Lenin's efforts.

The origin of Source A is an extract from the book 'The Soviet Experiment' written by American Professor Ronald Grigor Suny in 1998.¹ This extract has value to this investigation as, being written in 1998, the author has had access to the Soviet Archives that opened to the public in 1992. However, Suny being American, his writing may be influenced by the long-lasting tensions existing between the United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republic [USSR], thus limiting the reliability of his perspective on the topic. The purpose of this extract is to analyse Stalin's policies towards women and their consequences. Its content demonstrates how the rise in women's employment, the conservative distribution of housework and the prohibition of abortion under Stalin did not liberate women. This content is valuable to this investigation as Suny is an expert specialised in the Soviet Union and he here directly discusses the topic of women's emancipation. Although subjective vocabulary is occasionally used, the content may be seen as reliable as evidence such as statistics are used to support arguments.

¹ Suny, R 1998, *The Soviet Experiment: Russia, the USSR and the Successor States*, 3rd ed. edn, Oxford University Press, New York. p.278-279

The origin of source B is a propaganda poster drawn by Soviet artist Grigory Shegal in 1931.² This origin is valuable as it provides an insight into how women's role in society was presented to the public; highlighting governmental promises of liberating them from housework. With the slogan 'Down with kitchen slavery! Let there be new household life'³, the poster's purpose was to increase popular support for Stalin from Russian women by directly encouraging them to emancipate, to thus increase economic growth. The purpose of this propaganda is a limitation as the creator's perspective is restricted to his party's ideology, making the poster unlikely to reflect reality. The content of the poster is the typical Soviet woman, dressed in red, literally stepping into society's door to escape 'kitchen slavery', thus symbolising her emancipation. This provides value to the investigation as it indicates that Stalin promoted the maintenance of Lenin's goal of women's emancipation in its early years of rule, as Lenin is the author of the term 'kitchen slavery'⁴. However, the content can also be seen as limited as it does not demonstrate the results of Stalin's policies on women in the late 1930s which are being investigated, but rather Stalin's promotion of women's employment.

Word count: 502

² Shegal, G 1931, *Down with kitchen slavery! Let there be new household life!*, Illustration, International Museum of Women, accessed 3 April 2018, <<http://exhibitions.globalfundforwomen.org/exhibitions/women-power-and-politics/appearance/emancipated>>

³ International Museum of Women n.d., *Emancipated Woman - Build Up Socialism!*, Global Fund for Women, accessed 3 April 2018, <<http://exhibitions.globalfundforwomen.org/exhibitions/women-power-and-politics/appearance/emancipated>>

⁴ Ibid.

Section 2: Investigation

During his rule, from 1917 to 1924, Lenin was determined to achieve a fundamental socialist principle, the emancipation of women, through women's integration in the economic activity and their equality with men inside households. From the start of his rule, in 1929, Stalin announced himself as a supporter of Lenin's women's liberation aim. Yet, although under Stalin women were treated as equals to men in the economic and legal spheres, this equality was largely undermined inside households. Besides, Stalin further restricted women as laws taking fundamental rights away from them were established. This thereby suggests that Stalin maintained Lenin's efforts to emancipate women to a limited extent between 1929 and 1939.

Lenin's efforts were in some aspects maintained by Stalin as women's employment rose and prejudices on jobs reserved to men were reduced. Historian Richard Stites suggests that Stalin held similar views to Lenin regarding women's potential to contribute to the economy like men, as workers.⁵ Economic changes during the first decade of Stalin's rule resulted in women constituting 43% of the proletariat by 1939.⁶ The number of new women workers in the 1930s escalated to 10 million⁷, an unprecedented achievement, as acknowledged by historian Wendy Goldman who asserts that 'in no country of the world did [women] come to constitute such a significant part of the working class in so short time'.⁸ The effect this had on women is debated. According to historian Janet Evans, Stalin's government saw this increase in job opportunities as liberating as it signified economic independence.⁹ Contrastingly, historian Sarah Davies argues that 'it is unlikely that working-class women viewed their work as anything more than a source of income'.¹⁰ Davies' perspective is seen as valuable as she specialises in the USSR under Stalin and wrote her book in 1997.

⁵ Stites, R 1991, *The Women's Liberation Movement in Russia: Feminism, Nihilism and Bolshevism 1860-1930*, 2 edn, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, p.385

⁶ Grant, J 1998, *Stalin and the Soviet Union - Longman History in Depth Series*, 4edn, Longman, Indiana, p.115

⁷ Suny, op. cit., p.278-279

⁸ Goldman, W 2002, *Women at the Gates: Gender and Industry in Stalin's Russia*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, p.1

⁹ Evans, J 1981, 'The Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the Women's Question: The Case of the 1936 Decree 'In Defense of Mother and Child'', *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 16, no. 4, 4 October, accessed 13 May 2018, JSTOR <http://www.jstor.org/stable/260345>, Sage Publications, Ltd., p.766

¹⁰ Davies, S 1997, *Popular Opinion in Stalin's Russia: Terror, Propaganda and Dissent, 1934-1941*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, p.67

This thus enabled her to access testimonies from Soviet women. It can be argued that women's emancipation in the workforce was to some extent encouraged by Stalin as the traditional categorisation of jobs by gender was reduced. Women were able to break free from stereotypes and began working in various industries as suggested by scholar Ronald Suny, 'Soviet women were increasingly found in occupations formerly closed to them'.¹¹ The evolution of women's employment patterns was enabled through the establishment of quotas for women in industries, training in educational institutions¹² and increased access to education. Government support to mothers also contributed to the peak in women's employment. The USSR went from having 2,155 kindergartens in 1927 to 19,611 in 1932¹³, thus liberating women from traditional strains of having to take care of children at home. However, this did not successfully achieve its aim as historian Gail Lapidus asserts that 'the need for institutional child care vastly exceeded its availability'.¹⁴ Emancipation in the workforce is further debated as although women could work in various industries, they did not achieve equality with men inside the workforce's hierarchy. Scholar William Mandel contends that equality for women in employment and education was 'so much greater than in any nonsocialist country [...] that it is very difficult indeed to challenge its superiority of socialism for women'.¹⁵ Conversely, social revisionist historian Sheila Fitzpatrick argues that 'women tended to be clustered in low-skill, low-paying jobs'¹⁶ due to remaining prejudices from those in power. Fitzpatrick's book is considered more reliable as it was published following the release of Soviet Archives. Besides, Mandel was a left-wing political activist, thus suggesting that his objectivity may be limited. In 1919, Lenin established the *Zhenotdel*, an organisation aiming at strengthening women's influence in society. Stalin abolished it in 1930, declaring women's emancipation had already been achieved, thus marking the beginning of a regressive policy towards women.¹⁷ This change in Soviet approach can be explained by the differences in Lenin's and Stalin's intentions. As veraciously stated by Lapidus, Lenin

¹¹ Suny, op. cit., p.279

¹² Lapidus, G 1978, *Women in Soviet Society: Equality, Development and Social Change*, University of California Press, Ltd., Berkeley and Los Angeles, California, p.98-99

¹³ Lapidus, op. cit., p.130

¹⁴ Ibid., p.108

¹⁵ William, S 1975, *Soviet Women*, Anchor Press/Doubleday, Garden City, New York, p.74

¹⁶ Fitzpatrick, S 1999, *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary life in extraordinary times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s*, Oxford University Press, New York, p.139

¹⁷ Stites, op. cit., p.344

showed 'concern with the fate of women themselves'¹⁸, whereas Stalin '[viewed] the increased employment of women not in terms of its effects on women but as essential to the fulfilment of the economic plans'.¹⁹ Women were therefore liberated through increased job opportunities between 1929 and 1939, although these were somewhat limited due to the agenda behind it.

Furthermore, Lenin believed women's emancipation could only be achieved by giving women equal rights to men. In 1926, Stalin expressed his support for Lenin's ideology by calling for 'the abolition of all inequality and all oppression' concerning women.²⁰ Stalin maintained the socialist principle of equality under the law as the 1936 Constitution stated that 'women in the USSR are accorded equal rights with men in all spheres of [...] public activity'.²¹ The text asserted that equality also applied to 'rest and leisure'²², as Lenin argued that 'as long as women are engaged in housework, their position is still a restricted one'.²³ This was supported by the distribution of propaganda posters, like the one drawn by Shegal²⁴, in which Stalin's government encouraged women to escape domestic slavery and contribute to the economy. However, in stark contrast to Stalin's promises, historian Orlando Figes asserts that 'in 1932-34, working women were spending three times longer than their husbands doing household chores, but by 1936 they were spending five times longer'.²⁵ Women could therefore not emancipate under Stalin's rule, as equality in housework was not achieved. In fact, women's conditions worsened as the increase in their employment combined with conservative views on housework organisation made them both externally and internally pressured. Suny accurately claims that women 'carr[ied] the

¹⁸ Lapidus, op. cit., p.74

¹⁹ Lapidus, op. cit., p.98

²⁰ Stalin, J 1926, 'International Communist Women's Day', *Pravda*, 7 March, accessed 3 April 2018, <<https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1926/03/07.htm>>

²¹ *The Constitution of the USSR - Article 122*, 1936, transcribed by Ryan, S 1950, *From "On the Draft Constitution of the U.S.S.R."*, Lawrence and Whishart, London, accessed 3 April 2018, <<https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/subject/women/conts.htm>>

²² Ibid.

²³ Lenin, V 1919, *The Tasks of the Working Women's Movement in the Soviet Republic*, speech, The Fourth Moscow City Non-Party Conference of Women Workers, 23 September cited in Lapidus, op. cit., p.74

²⁴ Shegal, G 1931, *Down with kitchen slavery! Let there be new household life!*, Illustration, International Museum of Women, accessed 3 April 2018, <<http://exhibitions.globalfundforwomen.org/exhibitions/women-power-and-politics/appearance/emancipated>>

²⁵ Figes, O 2014, *Revolutionary Russia, 1891-1991: A History*, 1 edn, Henry Holt and Company, LLC, New York, p.185

infamous double burden of work inside and outside the home'.²⁶ Whereas legal equality between genders was maintained by Stalin, equality inside households, a cause close to Lenin's heart, regressed, indicating that Stalin did not maintain Lenin's efforts to emancipate women.

Furthermore, Stalin established policies restricting women's freedom; liberties that were accorded under Lenin. In 1918, Lenin eased divorce obtainment under the Family Code, claiming that women should be able to escape abusive marriages. However, Stalin believed that Lenin's law had broken families apart and reduced birth rates. He therefore made divorce harder to obtain in 1935, opposing Lenin's women's liberation aim.²⁷ Furthermore, in 1936, a law prohibiting abortion was established; taking away women's right over their bodies. Although the legalisation of abortion had been imposed by Lenin solely to protect women's health, Stalin prohibited it, stating that 'The Soviet woman has the same rights as the man, but that does not free her from a great and honourable duty which nature has given her'.²⁸ In Stalin's eyes, society's accomplishment was thus more important than women's well-being. Fitzpatrick argues that this law 'came as a shock [...], since the removal of Tsarist prohibitions had been conspicuous part of early Soviet 'liberationist' legislation'.²⁹ Contrastingly, historian Stephen Kotkin contends that 'Stalinism, far from being a partial retreat [...] remained forward-looking and progressive throughout'.³⁰ Although Kotkin is a respected expert, Fitzpatrick's claim seems to provide more accuracy as it is widely supported by scholars, including Nicholas Timasheff who classifies this time period as 'the Great Retreat'³¹. Stalin intended to increase birth rates to stimulate economic growth, however, this abolition worsened conditions for women. Researcher Elizaveta Sadvokasova argues that '[prohibiting abortion] did not and could not be any serious stimulant to raising the birth rate [...] it merely led many women [...] to have illegal abortions'.³² The number of abortions per 1000 people in towns increased from

²⁶ Suny, op. cit., p.278

²⁷ Figes, op.cit., p.183

²⁸ Stalin, J 1936, *Labour*, (n.p.), 27 April, cited in Stites, op. cit., p.386

²⁹ Fitzpatrick, op. cit., p.152

³⁰ Kotkin, S 1995, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization*, University of California Press, Ltd., Berkeley and Los Angeles, California, p.6

³¹ Timasheff, N 1946, *The Great Retreat: The Growth and Decline of Communism in Russia*, E.P. Dutton & Company, INC., New York

³² Sadvokasova, E A 1969, *Sotsial' no-gigienicheskie aspekty regulirovaniia razmerov sem'i*, (n.p.), Moscow, p.117, cited in Lapidus, op.cit., p.114

6.1 in 1926 to 10.8 in 1939.³³ Therefore, Stalin did not follow Lenin's women's emancipation goal as new legislations restricted women's rights, subsequently restraining them further.

Stalin did not aspire to liberate women for their own well-being. His policies were motivated by the goal of increasing economic growth and birth-rates. Under his rule, women had more job opportunities, including those traditionally reserved for men, but they were only offered low-ranking positions. Gender equality under the law was maintained by Stalin from Lenin's ideology; indicating greater liberty for women. However, women did not escape domestic slavery under Stalin, one of Lenin's goals. The double burden of working and managing housework, combined with the deprivation of divorce and abortion's rights indicated that Lenin's efforts to emancipate women were maintained to a limited extent by Stalin in the years 1929-39.

Word count: 1355

³³ Goldman, W 1993, *Women, the State and Revolution: Soviet Family Policy and Social Life, 1917-1936*, Cambridge University Press, New York, p.294

Section 3: Reflection

This investigation allowed me to expand my understanding of historians' work, who study past people's thoughts and behaviours. Following the historical method made me appreciate the challenges historians face. Unlike mathematics, the complexity of human-beings means that no historical events can be explained to a full and reliable extent, although the repetition of points in various sources suggests accuracy.

I have noticed that historians have their own perspective, linked to their background, and use these to draw conclusions. In Suny's extract, the use of the words 'infamous' and 'desperately'³⁴ struck me by their subjectivity. Although I have used a wide range of sources to support my arguments, most of them will therefore contain their own bias, thus limiting their reliability.

I had difficulties finding historians' books on women under Lenin and Stalin only. This lack of secondary sources may perhaps be explained by the fact that history remains a male-dominated area, where less interest may be expressed for this topic. However, I was able to find relevant sources, including several written by female scholars. The censorship present under Stalin, also contributed to limiting the availability of analytical historians' insight from the time.

After initial research, I planned the different parts of my essay based on points that were recurrent in sources. However, I was subject to historical bias as I tended to look for quotes supporting my arguments. The selection of sources is a limitation faced by historians which can only be resolved by reading as many sources as possible, and evaluating the reliability of differing perspectives. This evaluation was challenging. I firstly looked at the dates of the sources, as the USSR kept information hidden until its collapse. This thus implied that the authors of sources written after 1992 had access to more complete information than others. Furthermore, I explored the background of historians as this can limit the reliability of their view, like Mandel and his political activism.

³⁴ Suny, op. cit., p.278

Therefore, throughout my investigation, I followed the goal of historians which is to explain past historical events, by staying as objective as possible.

Word count: 343

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – source A

Extract from 'The Soviet Experiment' (1998) Ronald Grigor Suny, p. 278-279

Suny, R 1998, *The Soviet Experiment: Russia, the USSR and the Successor States*, 3rd ed. edn, Oxford University Press, New York

'The Stalinist regime desperately needed labour for its industrial revolution, and its policy toward women was aimed at bringing them into the workforce. Women's labor was no longer primarily seen as liberating but as a duty to socialist society. Women would henceforth carry the infamous double burden of work inside and outside the home. During the drive to industrialise, from 1929 to 1941, more than 10 million women entered the wage-labor force, and the percentage of women at work rose from 24 percent to 39 percent of the total number of waged workers. Women particularly dominated light industry, where they eventually made up two-thirds of the workforce, but Soviet women were also increasingly found in occupations formerly closed to them, such as construction, lumbering, electronics, and machine-building. Though prejudices remained that heavy lifting or skilled labor was not appropriate for women, over time women gained many jobs designated earlier as men's work. [...] New rules were passed in 1935 discouraging divorce, and the following years a new family law code encouraged women to have as many children as possible. The law prohibited all abortions, except those in which the mother's life was threatened, and guaranteed pregnant women job security and lighter work. The state increased monthly nursing allowances and other subsidies and extended maternity leaves up to sixteen weeks for all female workers. Since contraception was hardly available and abortion banned, women were compelled to carry all pregnancies to term. Stalin's pronatalism stemmed, not from the original Bolshevik program of female liberation, but from his own agenda of industrialization and defence'

Appendix 2 – source B

Shegal, G 1931, *Down with kitchen slavery! Let there be new household life!*, Illustration, International Museum of Women

