

ATL: thinking skills

Task:

The following essay has a strong focus on the question and good structure. However, it lacks detail in places.

In pairs discuss where more detail could be added to strengthen the evidence given to support the arguments

To what extent was the role of propaganda used to consolidate and maintain one authoritarian state.

Authoritarian state leaders have always used propaganda as a major tool for their establishment and maintenance of power. Joseph Stalin, the “Man of Steel” who ruled over the Soviet Union from 1928 until 1953, successfully manipulated the minds of millions of Russians thanks to the strong propaganda campaigns that were present in every aspect of his dictatorship. As part of all his economic and social policies, intensive propaganda campaigns relentlessly bombarded the soviet people to ensure they whole heartedly supported them. The cult of personality was also part of the propaganda drive to insure total obedience and control. However, the use of the terror also played a role in Stalin’s maintenance of power.

Propaganda played a key role from 1928 in establishing Stalin as the heir to Lenin. History was rewritten to put Stalin at the centre of all the key events leading to the Bolshevik take-over of power and to ensure that he appeared as Lenin’s right hand man and confidant. This became part of the cult of personality established by Stalin in which propaganda glorified every aspect of Stalin’s personality and his actions, indeed making him appear godlike in his wisdom and his care for the Russian people. In a society experiencing acute changes and turmoil, the Soviet people needed to need believe in the fact that Stalin was a strong leader who could steer the nation through difficult times and so this cult of personality was very successful in helping to maintain and to strengthen Stalin’s power.

The arts and the media were also propaganda tools to enhance support for Stalin and promote the cult of personality. Stalin became the favourite subject of the Soviet press; his name and images began to appear everywhere on the media. He was omnipresent. The state-controlled newspaper was called Pravda, which means truth. As reported by John Steinbeck “his portrait does not just hang in every museum, but in a museum’s every room.” Socialist realism was imposed on artists and writers, in order to portray a strong nation and to promote the success of Stalin’s policies.

Propaganda also played a key role in supporting and promoting economic and social policies, Robert Service writes that collectivization made “Stalin look as a true communist and people believed he went where no other communist had ever gone before.” Young communists, indoctrinated by Stalin’s’ propaganda to belief that collectivisation was a key part of the socialist revolution eagerly partook in helping to round up the peasants and get them into the collective farms, or to send those who resisted to theOrp gulags. The kulaks were portrayed as class enemies, and as such denounced by other farmers. During the Five Year Plans, Stalin used the Alexei Sakharov’s achievements as a propaganda tool to increase the production of quotas. Similarly, propaganda reinforced Stalin’s ideas regarding the role of women and the attacks on the church.

Propaganda against outside powers also strengthened Stalin's position. Propaganda consistently portrayed the rest of the world as being hostile to Soviet interests. This strengthened support for Stalin's policies to rapidly industrialise and to take action against those who supported Western, capitalist ideas. This was particularly the case after World War Two where propaganda relentlessly attacked the West as part of growing cold war hostility. The use of propaganda to generate fear of 'enemies everywhere' was a key part of the terror in general; propaganda via such methods as the show trials was designed to create a continual sense of fear; the population believed that those sentenced were 'enemies of the state'. This strengthened Stalin's position as people were afraid to speak out; it also fed into the cult of personality as Stalin was seen as the leader who could be trusted to find the enemies who were dangerous to the state.

However, propaganda was only one aspect of the methods used by Stalin to maintain power. As mentioned, the terror was also key. The show trials eliminated any potential opponents to Stalin. The purges of the late 1930s affected all areas of society and the randomness with which they affected the population created a genuine terror; although both the economy and the efficiency of the state was affected negatively, Stalin's own personal power was enhanced by the terror.

Stalin's economic policies were also important to his maintenance of power. Collectivisation, despite the terrible human suffering it caused, was a success for Stalin in that it brought the peasants under political control and ensured that grain would now always be available for the urban workers. The Five Year Plans led to a stronger economy which allowed Stalin to withstand the Nazi invasion of 1941.

In conclusion, propaganda played a fundamental role in the establishment and maintenance of power of Stalin. After all, the Vohzd used it in every aspect of the regime. The economic policies were themselves a tool to promote Communism and Stalin's greatness. Even the arts and media had to reflect the ideals of the Party and through the cult of personality Stalin became a hero, a god like figure for the entire Soviet population. The Terror and economic policies was also key to Stalin's maintenance of power; however their effectiveness was ensured by the relentless state propaganda.