Stalin
How did he exercise political control?
The Nature of the Stalinist State

- Lenin made clear the need for a ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’, though this is only a temporary stage.
- Thereafter, the state would not be needed; as society becomes based on co-operation, government would wither away.
- this did not happen; under Lenin the apparatus of the state increased, and this continued under Stalin.
Stalin’s Control of the Communist Party

- In theory the Communist Party was a democratic institution, but in reality power was centralised in the hands of party leadership.
- Stalin’s position as General Secretary allowed him to place supporters in key positions and allowed for his coming to power.
- Use of terror ensured he would not face any opposition from party members.
- Key consequence of Stalin’s methods: no institution within the USSR was able to gain any real power.
1936 Constitution

- 1936 Constitution illustrates the failure of democratic institutions to develop despite official statements given by the government.

- At face value, constitution was most democratic in the world- in practice, this was untrue.

- Constitution was directed at foreign governments: aim was to identify the way in which the Soviet granted liberties in comparison to the restrictive fascist states.

- Was designed to encourage west to ally with the Soviet; though the Constitution was not taken seriously neither abroad nor at home.
Failure of Political Institutions to Develop Power

- By 1924 the Party structure consisted of: Party Congress, Central Committee and the Politburo and each body was elected by members of the Communist Party.
- In reality however, elections were controlled from above with candidates that were favoured by the leadership being automatically given positions.
- This trend became fixed under Stalin.
- As the 1930s went on, these institutions and the Politburo met less frequently as Stalin increased his control over them.
Structure of the Communist Party

The structure of the Communist Party

**Politburo** The key decision-making body, made up of an inner group of party leaders. Elected by the...

**Central Committee** In theory this was the key decision-making body in the party but its power declined rapidly after 1922. By 1934 it met only once every four months. Stalin increased the size of its membership which made discussing policy in detail difficult. Its decision-making function was exercised by the Politburo on its behalf. Elected by the...

**Party Congress** A body made up of representatives of local party branches. It discussed the general programme of the party. It declined in influence at the end of the 1920s and met only twice (1934 and 1939) between 1930 and 1952.
Use of Terror

• Stalin’s control over the party was in part due to the use of fear and terror and the threat of fear and terror.

• Both were used against the sections of the party and had the effect of ensuring loyalty to Stalin.

• Great Terror saw the purging of party officials, Show Trials led to executions.

• The NKVD was Stalin’s instrument for terror and yet, they themselves were not safe.

• Terror as a method of rule was not only specific to Stalin, it was also used under Lenin though justifiably to avoid counter-revolution.
Use of Terror

- However, Stalin’s launch of the Great Terror was in 1934, a period when the Party’s position was more secure. This indicates that his use of terror was working to achieve his own agenda.

- Note: Stalinism cannot be seen as a consequence of Leninism. This is because where Lenin hoped to achieve a Dictatorship of the Proletariat, Stalin imposed a personal dictatorship.
What were the Limits on Stalin’s Power?

• Personal Limits: Even if he wanted to, he could not keep track/ control over every issue. He needed to prioritise matters that were of direct concern to himself.

• Limits imposed from within leadership: After removal of right/ left wing it is tempting to see the composition of the Politburo as ‘yes men’, however there is evidence of their opposition to various policies:
What were the Limits on Stalin’s Power?

• 1932: Stalin wanted to execute Ryutin, Politburo refused, he was sent to a prison camp for 10 years instead

• Stalin was forced to redraft the targets for the second Five Year Plan, after the Politburo vocalised that it was excessive and too demanding upon the people

• Some members also expressed concern over Stalin’s growing use of brutality.
  • Kuibyshev (Head of Gosplan)
  • Ordzhonikidze (Commissar Heavy Industry)
What were the Limits on Stalin’s Power?

• Limits imposed from below: Party members were concerned about the continuing threat from enemies home and abroad and pushed for policies that would strengthen Socialism in the USSR.

• Thus Stalin was following the wishes of rank/file members in bringing about rapid industrialisation.