

Stalin: man or monster



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Question 1 Source A was drawn by one of Stalin's enemies, so it shows Stalin a bad way. It is a mock travel poster showing piles of human skulls and with Stalin inviting you to " Visit the USSR's pyramids" This is a rather macabre and sarcastic caption as the ' pyramids' are pyramids of human skulls. These are meant to show all the millions of people Stalin had caused to be killed.

The ' pyramids' have black birds perching them, possibly vultures. These are traditional harbingers of death, and reinforce the image of Stalin as someone responsible for death. Stalin himself appears to be proud of his '

achievements' as we can see from his stance and the expression on his face.

Source B was an official Soviet painting and was painted by someone with Stalin's approval. It shows Stalin standing in front of a newly built dam.

This is a symbol of soviet achievement and Stalin is show in front of it to associate him with it. He is also shown with ordinary workers to associate him with them and make him seem like a ' friend of the people'. He is also shown as being better dressed than the workers, trying to show that " all men are equal, but some are more equal than others". Both sources show Stalin's power and control.

Source A shows how he has power over life and death and source B shows associates him with the power and success of the dam construction project.

The sources are different in that source B is supporting Stalin and his use of power and source A is saying he has abused his power. The points the two sources are trying to make are the opposite of each other. Stalin is also made to look more ugly in source A, to make the reader not like him.

Overall the sources give almost exact opposite impressions of Stalin. Source A makes him look bad, source B makes him look good. The only real similarity is that they both show him as someone powerful. Question 2 Source D was written by Stalin. It is an account of an earlier period of his life. In his story while he was exiled in Siberia Stalin saw people not caring about the deaths of people.

In the story Stalin tells these people they should care for men more. Stalin finishes by comparing “our leaders” to those men he met in Siberia. Stalin probably wrote this source so people reading it would think of him as caring and compassionate and to make the people he refers to as “our leaders” as heartless people. We cannot be sure that the source is reliable in its depiction of past events. It certainly is true that Stalin was exiled to Siberia earlier in his life.

However we cannot be sure if the particular story he tells is true. Given what we know of Stalin it seems unlikely he really cared about one death.

However whether the source tells us a true story or not is unimportant. The source is useful because it tells us about Stalin and the ways he tried to present himself to others. This source tells us that Stalin attempted to propagate his vision of himself as someone caring and compassionate. He wanted to appear this way so as to secure his position and continue the ‘Cult of Stalin’.

Stalin was paranoid and afraid of being overthrown so he constantly attempted to convince people to be on his side, even when he was already in total control. He also attempted to undermine people he believed to be his

enemies so that more people would not choose to follow them. These are the people he refers to as “our leaders” in the sources. We cannot work out from this source if the story Stalin tells is true. This is not important, however, as the evidence we glean from this source is about Stalin himself, not about his past.

Unfortunately we cannot work out from the source that Stalin is referring to when Stalin says “our enemies”. This could have been referring to any of his political enemies in the USSR or maybe even leaders of other countries.

Despite this the source still tells us that Stalin was worried by these enemies (whoever they were) and attempted to undermine them. In conclusion, the source does not provide much useful evidence about what it is telling us about but it does provide evidence by the way it is written and the purpose it was written for. Question 3 Source E was from a speech written to Congress of Soviets in 1935 and was published in Pravda, a Communist Party newspaper.

The writer has an opinion of Stalin as a great man. The passage praises Stalin for everything he has done for the USSR. It sounds like hero worship or ‘the Cult of Stalin’. The writer lived in the USSR during Stalin’s rule and may even have known Stalin himself.

This would have given him a chance to understand what Stalin was like and try to get this information across to others. By the language the writer uses we can see he is passionate about his subject. It sounds as though he really believes what he is saying, although we know Stalin had many people killed and ordered many atrocities committed. However the source may be

unreliable because it was published by someone under the shadow of Stalin's rule. Stalin obviously had very great influence on the writer's life. There are two main interpretations of this source.

One interpretation is that the writer truly believes what he is saying and didn't see (or chose to ignore) the darker side of Stalin's personality. At this time the purges and show trials were just starting and it is hard to believe that anyone who really knew the horror of what Stalin was doing would write like this man did. We know that Stalin used a lot of propaganda, such as sources B and D, to try and make his citizens admire him. It is possible this man was a product of this propaganda and believed what he was saying. The other interpretation is that he is only writing it because he has to.

If anyone wrote something criticising Stalin at the time he would probably have been executed. The writer may have been living in fear of his life and of those close to him and written something praising Stalin to keep them safe. We will never know which it is but either way the source isn't very reliable, the first way the writer is ignoring or does not know about the monstrous things Stalin has done and in the second way he would be lying about what he thought of Stalin to protect himself. Bukharin, a former supporter of Stalin, wrote source F. However Stalin betrayed him and this probably affected his view of him. This was from a speech he made about Stalin while in Paris in 1936.

It gives a completely different impression of Stalin to source E. This source criticises Stalin and says he cannot stand to be second best and will kill to be considered best. It also finishes with an emotive line " He is a narrow-

minded, malicious man – no, not a man, but a devil”. Bukharin once worked closely with Stalin and so got to see both his good points and his bad points.

Compare this with the writer of source E who appears to only see good in Stalin. The idea that Stalin always wanted to appear to be the best and was very distrustful and paranoid is backed up by sources B and H. It also fits in with what we already know about the purges and show trials. On the other hand Bukharin could be bitter about being betrayed by Stalin and exiled. This would cause him to speak badly about Stalin and ignore any good he has done.

The source is also emotive, from the last line it is clear that Bukharin hates Stalin and this may make him exaggerate the facts to get other people to hate him too. We do not know whom the speech was addressed to but Bukharin may have been trying to convince others of Stalin’s evil to make up for the fact he was betrayed by him. Overall I think source F is more reliable as someone who has seen both sides of Stalin wrote it. Source E seems only to have seen the good side when we know Stalin did a lot of evil things such as the purges. Question 4 Both these sources are cartoons about Stalin’s show trials.

Although source I doesn’t tell us when it was published it was probably around the same time as source J. They were both probably published in newspaper and would be about current events. Source I was published in America, a capitalist country and the USSR’s nemesis at the time. This would lead you to expect the source will criticise the show trials and it does.

The source is definitely criticising the show trials as that is what the audience would think and people buy newspapers written by people who will confirm opinions they already have, not to have their opinions knocked down. The source shows one of Stalin's show trials. There are four people standing in front of Stalin readily admitting their guilt. We can see that there is no jury and no lawyer defending the accused. All there is is Stalin as judge deciding what will happen and a lackey standing behind him (this may be a caricature of some political ally of Stalin's at the time). In the background we can see some soldiers standing around a gallows.

The four men may be shown as smiling and admitting their guilt because they may be admitting they're guilty in a sarcastic way because they know that whatever they say the result will be the same. This is further reinforced by the way in which Stalin is the judge and the gallows in the background shows how Stalin has already decided their fate. Of course we know that this was how it was in the show trials. Stalin is shown in the judge's chair because it was he who decided what happened to the people in the show trials. They weren't really trials at all, just a charade to add some authority to his political murders.

Source J was published in France. Although France was not a particularly strong rival of the USSR we know that many of Stalin's political enemies were exiled there (such as Bukharin in source F) and would speak out against him from there. The cartoon shows a courtroom with Stalin everywhere, in the judge's chair, as the prosecutor, as the jurors and making the transcript. This is a very simplistic cartoon with only one main point. This is again

showing how Stalin as acting as “ Judge, Jury and Executioner”. There is no chance of a fair trial as Stalin is deciding what is happening.

Also the way Stalin is writing the transcript of the trial might be showing how Stalin liked to ‘ change the past’ to make himself sound better. The cartoons are similar in that they both agree that Stalin had control over the show trials and they weren’t really proper trials at all. They both show Stalin as the only person with any power in the courtroom. The two sources differ in that source J is only showing that Stalin is the only person in control in the courtroom whereas source I shows more details such as the way the accused admitted their guilt even when they weren’t guilty and the gallows in the background showing how Stalin had already made up his mind.

However this is not a very significant difference, they still both agree fundamentally that the show trials were not real trials at all and were controlled by Stalin. Question 5 In order to decide whether Stalin was a man or a monster I first need to define what I mean by monster. Once I have done that I can start to look at the information I have to decide whether he was a man or a monster. I would define a monster as someone with a lack of compassion and as someone who performs inhuman or immoral acts on a large scale without understanding how he or she is hurting people or without remorse for the suffering they have caused.

However it could be argued that the things Stalin accomplished justified his inhuman actions. Did the ends really justify the means? I will look at sources and my own knowledge to decide. Firstly I will see if I can find evidence that Stalin was a monster. There is a lot of evidence showing that Stalin was a

monster. For example source A shows piles of skulls of people Stalin has had killed.

Of course it is only a picture but it is a chilling thought that if there really were pyramids of skulls of all the people Stalin had put to death then the piles we seeing the picture would be just a small part of it. Stalin had tens of millions people put to death or caused them to die by policies such as the artificial famine. Stalin didn't seem to care that he was killing millions of people and destroying countless lives for his own aim. This would definitely make him a monster in my view. Another source that shows Stalin as a monster is source F.

In this source Bukharin (who knew Stalin personally) would kill a man rather than acknowledge him as his better in something. This again indicates that Stalin doesn't really care about suffering he causes for other people. Sources I and J show how Stalin perverted the cause of justice for his own security. They also show how Stalin desperately wanted to put himself in absolute power. His lust for power at the expense of others is another factor I could say made him a monster. Source L tells us the opinion that Stalin was a skilled politician yet had a darker side to his nature.

This back up what we already know. Stalin committed a huge number of atrocities in the time he ruled the USSR. To gain power he lied and used devious political machinations to betray almost everyone he allied himself with to get there. When he was in power Stalin mass murdered his own people. IN an attempt to achieve ' collectivisation' he destroyed the lives of over 300, 000 Kulaks, whose only crime was to have owned property of some

kind before the revolution. Stalin also introduced an artificial famine by sending huge amounts of grain and other foodstuffs the USSR produced to other countries for trade.

This provided him with the cash to help improve Russia but at the cost of an estimated six million deaths. This shows how little he cared for human suffering in the name of his own goals. Stalin was a paranoid man afraid that everyone was plotting to overthrow him. After the murder of Kirov he really started purging not only the country but also his own government.

At least one in three of all the army officers in the army were executed with little or no reason given. Anyone who spoke out against Stalin or his actions would be detained and probably executed almost instantly. In 1936 Stalin started the show trials. As said above, these were only there to gratify Stalin's need to prove that he was right before he killed his enemies. During the war years Stalin invaded many other countries and began doing the same things there as well.

It seems that Stalin must be a monster. He caused the deaths of millions of his people without any apparent remorse. He was a master of lies and propaganda, so much so that in the show trials he even started believing it himself. He is possibly the one figure in the twentieth century that caused the most pain, suffering and death. Many people however say that Stalin's achievements outweigh all the evil he did. He was definitely a skilled politician and he sometimes seemed to genuinely believe what he was doing was best for the state.

Achievements such as those in source B might never have happened without Stalin's influence. These helped modernise an ailing Russia to bring her back as one of the world's superpowers. Some would say that the amount of happiness that Stalin's five year plans caused in ordinary workers lives outweighed the pain and suffering that were necessary to make them work. Source D seems to show a more human side of Stalin's nature. The source may have been written for propaganda purposes but if it wasn't then it shows that Stalin was not always as he was by the end of his rule.

Maybe source M is right in saying that absolute power corrupted Stalin absolutely and it wasn't really his fault. Maybe anyone in his position trying to get the USSR onto its feet would have done as Stalin did. Source G forgives him in a similar way. It says that he was only doing what he thought best for the country. Source E shows us how some people in the USSR at least saw much good in Stalin. It's almost like a prayer or worship.

Many would discount this offhand as propaganda but maybe there is some truth in what the writer is saying. He certainly seems to passionately believe it. Source K is a similar source, which, again, may people would just call propaganda but there may be some truth in it. Stalin certainly seemed devoted to the party's ideals and did a lot of things that he judged were best 'for the people'. Just because his judgement was flawed did that make him a monster? We know Stalin certainly achieved a lot.

When he took control the USSR was a shattered nation that needed to rebuild. The five-year plans helped in this. By the Second World War Russia

was a modern superpower. Many people in the USSR experienced benefit from Stalin's policies.

An ordinary person living in Russia may have had a better life because of his policies. Stalin might defend himself by saying that the needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few. And can we forget all that the newly developed USSR did in the Second World War? Some people think if the USSR hadn't developed as much as it did and built up its armed forces to fight Germany's forces then there might have taken years longer to finish, maybe resulting in even more deaths than Stalin caused during his rule. However overall I think I must find Stalin as a monster. He is one of the greatest mass murderers in history and no amount of good can really excuse all the evil he did.