

# Stalin: man or monster essay sample



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Whilst answering the question it is important to have a clear definition as to what a monster is, in order to make it apparent as to what each side is arguing for and against. My personal definition of a monster is an inhumanly cruel or wicked person. So the essay will discuss whether or not Stalin was a monster under my personal definition. I am going to discuss both sides of the argument and then draw a conclusion.

When deciding whether or not Stalin was a monster, it is easy to get carried away with minor details. After all Stalin united a continent stretching from the Baltic to the Bearing Straits. One could argue that the situation In Russia was so desperate that only the pressures of brute force could have produced such a rapid industrialization, together with the necessary food. All his aims had a purpose and indeed lives were lost, that is not debatable, but it was necessary it order to achieve his aims. Most of his polices were successful.

Stalin, enforcing the Collectivisation Policy, solved the food shortage. More food was grown, modern agricultural methods were put into place ending the famine. Also the new methods of farming being taught by agricultural experts brought backward farmers up to date and the exports raised money for industrialisation.

Source B shows Stalin to be great man who made Russian industry prosper. It shows the results of industrialization, a painting of the newly opened hydroelectric power station in the 1930's. It shows Stalin mixing with the workers who seem to be very honoured indeed to be meeting Stalin.

Stalin's industrialisation did make Russia a very successful industrial country. By the late 1930s many Soviet workers had improved their conditions by

gaining well-paid skilled jobs and earning bonuses for meeting targets. There was an almost non-existent unemployment rate. Stalin also encouraged woman to work by setting up childcare services; four out of five new workers recruited between 1932 and 1937 were women. Stalin also made education compulsory and free for all. Industrialisation created a huge increase in population of raw materials such as oil, coal and steel. Also the modernisation was vital in order to survive World War II.

Source C shows how Stalin was idolized by the Russian people. Many of the Russian people saw Stalin was a ‘dictator of the people’ and the average soviet-citizen admired Stalin. Also his style of government, i. e. he has complete power, which was not shown to the soviet citizens making it very easy for him to disassociate himself, was very popular. Surely, this could not be a monster just a very hard man with clear aims that would do anything to achieve them, in order to help his people. Any action taken by Stalin were sincere and honourable.

One could also argue that Stalin was a great leader he made Russia strong enough to eventually drive the might of Germany’s army from its land. One could argue the supreme justification for the defeat was thanks to Stalin, not forgetting that it was only Germany that attempted to invade Russia. Stalin obvious appeared strong to opposition because no attempts to invade were made during his time in power, apart from Germany.

The idea of Stalin being a great dictator was reinforced by a biography of Stalin published in 1983 in Britain ‘It is my belief that Stalin was a skilled,

indeed gifted politician and one of the greatest political figures of the twentieth Century.'

Source G also backs up the idea that Stalin felt that brute force was needed in order to achieve his aims. Source G basically says that Stalin intentions were honourable. He did what he in order to save a way of life; 'Stalin was convinced that the use of terror and executions were necessary for the defence of Socialism and Communism.' Here Stalin is almost admitting to the Purges, or the killing of the Kulaks, but he is saying that he did what he did in order to save collectivisation because he felt the kulaks were standing in the way of his policy. He is saying that he did what he did for the Soviet people. 'He considered this be done in the interests of the Party and the working masses.'

All these sources urge one to think that Stalin was not a monster but just a hard man with a strong desire to achieve his aims and no amount of human cost was going to stand in his way that was consequence. After all his aims were in order to create a greater Russia.

On the other hand, the opposing view is that Stalin's policies, though superficially successful, actually weakened Russia. After all, any actions taken by Stalin would have of seemed successful due to the desperate situation Russia was in.

One of the many monstrous actions taken by Russia was the Purges. These murders slowed economic progress by removing many of the most experienced men, and almost caused military defeat during the first few months of war by depriving the army of all its experienced generals. Stalin

used these murders as an excuse to ‘Purge’ or clear out his opponents in his party, which eventually worked against him. The army purges were nearly fatal to the USSR when Hitler invaded the USSR; the Red Army had a lack of good quality officers.

As the purges were extended university lecturers and teachers, miners and engineers, factory managers and ordinary workers all disappeared. About 18 million people had been transported to labour camps, 10 million died. The long-term impact of living with terror and distrust haunted the USSR for a generation. Stalin’s monstrous actions succeeded in destroying any sense of independent thinking; survival depended on blind obedience.

Source I shows Stalin ‘show trials’, which were another example of the monstrous actions undertaken by Stalin. In the great ‘show trials’ loyal Bolsheviks like Kamenev, Bukharin and Zinoviev confessed to being traitors of the state. Around 500, 000 Party members were arrested on charges of anti-soviet activities and either executed or sent to labour camps. This was yet another example of Stalin’s outrageous behaviour. The human cost was enormous; this was a colossal example of genocide on one’s own race.

Collectivisation brought yet more deaths, 5 million starved to death during the Famine in 1932-33 and after the war of the Kulaks, millions died. Also food production fell which led to economic problems due to the millions of deaths.

Industrialisation led to enormous human cost. 100, 000 workers died in the construction of the Belomor Canal, and this was not unique millions died each year on major projects. The conditions were appalling and there were

many deaths and accidents. There was a great deal of inefficiency and duplication of effort and waste. Stalin was quite prepared to destroy the way of life of the Soviet people to help industrialisation.

Sources A, B and C also reinforce the idea that Stalin was a monster. They all show how Stalin used propaganda to paint a false picture of himself. All these sources give a different impression of Stalin, however there are some similarities.

Source A is a cartoon published in Paris in the 1930s. It shows Stalin and the results of his policies according to the artist. The cartoon features Stalin showing three pyramids of skulls as if he was a tour guide. The caption under reads, “ Visitez L'URSS ses pyramides!” This translates to, “ Visit the pyramids of the USSR!”

This source is very famous and was drawn by an exiled Russian, therefore the artist could be bitter and biased against Stalin and his policies.

Source B is an official Soviet painting of Stalin with workers at a hydroelectric power station in the 1930s. It is trying to show the results of industrialisation. It shows Stalin talking to the workers, they seem very proud to be meeting Stalin. Because it is an official Soviet painting it is very likely to be biased and a source of propaganda as it would be Stalin or the government who commissioned it.

Source C is a photograph of Stalin congratulating wives of army officers. The women are reaching for Stalin in a fanatical manner; they seem desperate to touch him. The source is a photograph, which gives the impression that it is

a reliable source. However this is not the case, Stalin could have had the photograph doctored or had people pose and claimed it was showing something it was not, therefore disassociating himself from the Purges.

All the sources give very different impressions of Stalin. Source A shows Stalin to be a monster responsible for the death of millions of people.

Stalin's policies were responsible for the death of millions of people.

Collectivisation caused the death of thousands of Kulaks and left many homeless and starving. One million people were executed during the purges, two million people died in camps, one million people died in prison and eight million people died as a result of the work ethic Stalin began.

Source B shows Stalin to be a great man who made Russian industry prosper. Stalin's industrialisation did make Russia successful, however the source does not show the negative side of Stalin's industrialisation. Life was very hard and factory conditions were very dangerous. Any kind of discipline problems such as lateness or absence would be punished with sacking, which could also mean the loss of homes.

Source C shows Stalin to be a caring man who was congratulating the wives of his army officers. It shows him to be admired, even idolized by his people and put in a hero like position. This is a good representation of some Russian people's view of Stalin. Many people saw him as the hero of Russia and a very great man. However many opposed Stalin and his policies, but in voicing their view they could be punished with death. Stalin had one million people executed during the purges. Many of the people executed had

opposed Stalin but were accused of crimes such as spying and plotting to murder. Many others were sent to labour camps.

However, sources B and C are similar in some ways. They both show Stalin to be a great man. It is an excellent interpretation of Stalin's cult of personality. The Soviet people sincerely believed in Stalin and this belief was developed into a 'Cult of Personality.' Every Russian town had a Stalin square or a Stalin Avenue and a large Stalin statue. Soviet people were deluged with portraits, photographs and statues of Stalin.

Source G shows Stalin's paranoia as a dictator and explains why he killed so many innocent people. Stalin's paranoia was shown, when he killed 25, 000 army officers. Stalin felt he did not have the army's support, he was never proven and to stay as a dictator he needed an army. Therefore executing them to stop them from ever overruling him was a true case of paranoia, which was going to work against him in the long term.

Stalin's behaviour and paranoia leads one to believe that he was in fact a monster. In order to achieve his aims, he did not need to kill so many people. The enormous human cost was purely down to his monstrous personality. In 1937, the USSR was a modern state and it was this that saved it from defeat when Hitler invaded in 1941. (Russia won the war in spite of Stalin not because of him.) The situation was so desperate that any government could improve the current situation. Ridiculously high targets for industrial production placed unnecessary pressure on the workers leading to slipshod work and poor quality products. All the sources mentioned reinforce this argument that Stalin was a monster.



In conclusion, I feel that Stalin was a great leader however I do believe that he did incorporate into his personality some monstrous qualities. By this I mean that I do not truly believe that any normal human being could kill millions and millions of innocent people, and argue that what he did was not the action of a wicked or inhuman person.

One must not forget that Stalin was voted into power under the ideal that he would follow the idealism of Marx and Lenin. However, instead of creating a new classless society in which everybody was free and equal, ordinary workers and peasants were just as exploited as they were under the Tsars. Instead of Marxism, socialism and the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’ Stalin created his own political ideology, Stalinism and the dictatorship of Stalin.

I would personally follow the view, that Stalin was a talented politician with great drive and ambition. However, he was taken over by power, which turned him into a monstrous oppressor. I feel that had Stalin not been so monstrous his rule would have gone by without acknowledgement. Finally, I feel that Stalin was character with a very evil monstrous nature which was brought to light through the power that he gained.