

How far did stalin's social policies change

People



How far did Stalin's social policies change the lives of women and children in the years to 1945? Following Stalin's succession to power in 1929, once again, Russia was transformed. As part of Socialism In One Country, Stalin focussed his intentions internally. This involved the notorious industrialisation and collectivisation drives which were intended to reform the economy. Nevertheless, do so, Stalin realised he would have to create a more ordered and disciplined society.

Consequently, as part of the Revolution from Above and what was deemed by Sheila Fitzpatrick as the "great retreat", where Stalin turned away from the policies of his predecessor, Stalin embarked on numerous social policies which focussed on the reforms of education and family life. Consequently, Stalin's legislation on the one hand, changed the lives of countless Soviet women and children. Nevertheless, it is also argued that his policies were no similar to previous social legislation under the Tsar and Lenin.

Consequently the extent of change and the significance of Stalin's policies remains in question. Following the Russian revolution, Lenin assumed the Premiership of Russia and redefined the social policies experienced by women and children. In terms of policies which affected women and the family, Lenin was comparatively liberal compared to Tsarist Russia. He considered traditional marriage to be slavery, economic and sexual exploitation. Robert Service has argued that as a result, official spokesmen began to urge wives to refuse to give "automatic obedience to husbands. Lenin went against previously traditional conservative policy and legalised divorce as well as abortion. Lenin attempted to free women from their domestic roles under Tsarism by requisitioning large scale provision of facilities such as canteens,

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laundries and crèches as part of what is argued by Corin and Fiehn as the "socialisation of domestic services." Although, in retrospect, this policy was unaffordable, costing well over the national budget and consequently, the socialisation was not universal, reducing overall change.

Nevertheless, Lenin did implement legislation previously unthinkable to allow free love, as well as the creation of the Zhenotdel, which gave opportunity for the first time for women to be involved in the running of the state.

Additionally, Lenin reformed the education system which ultimately impacted heavily on children. Lenin focussed on an industrial education which made use of apprenticeship schemes, but to the detriment of a broad education. Yet, also as part of his liberalising of once Tsarist Russia, he took the power to discipline away from teachers and scrapped the examination and homework methods of education.

He also denounced all university lectures as members of the bourgeoisie and members of a hostile class in the education was more liberal than anything previous children had ever seen. Under Stalin, the changing of social policies and their effect on women were numerous. Stalin as part of industrialisation put greater emphasis on job opportunities for women, by 1940 for example, nearly 41% of heavy industry workers were women. Although, in retrospect, women were still underpaid, receiving only 60-65% of a man's salary in the same job, reducing overall change.

Nevertheless, in contrast to Lenin and Tsarist Russia, Stalin put even greater focus on educational opportunities for women, increasing places for the number of women in colleges and universities. Although, again, these

courses were purely focussed on industry, reducing overall change from Lenin. Although, as part of urbanisation, women obtained greater opportunities to work in agriculture and by 1945, 80% of workers on the collectives were female. Stalin also placed even greater emphasis on propaganda compared to Lenin and employed the Stakhanov spirit in the female working environment to ensure maximum potential.

Women also saw greater opportunities to serve in the armed forces and by 1945, half a million Soviet Women had served. However, Stalin did abolish the Zhenotdel, formed under Lenin, reducing women's ability to be involved in the running of the state once again, as under Tsarism, reducing the breath of change in overall opportunity. Additionally, Lynch argues that the increase in women into the armed forces, whilst increased their equality, increased their likelihood of "mistreatment" and "sexual abuse", especially by senior officers.

This bears similarity to pre-Leninism where abuse of women was commonplace, reducing overall significance of Stalin's social policies effect on changing the lives of women for the better. Although, the state under Stalin compensated the abuse of women in the home itself by introducing a series of social policies which championed the revival of marriage. For example, the state now promoted marriage, legalising wedding rings which had previously been made illegal under Lenin. Stalin in contrast to Lenin who legalised divorce, limited the availability to end a marriage.

This has the effect of reducing the number of women and children becoming impoverished, under Lenin and his policy of free love. Women and children

would no longer be left to fend for themselves if a husband chose to divorce. Local Party officials would in addition seek out any husbands who absconded from their marital obligations ensuring this change would be successful and significant. Women were also encouraged more to increase their reproductivity. This was due to greater amounts of women in work as part of industrialisation.

Stalin introduced incentives to women with a certain amount of children-7 would gain 2, 0000 roubles per year for 5 consecutive years. However, this increased the likelihood of pressure being put on women from their male counterparts to terminate their babies as had been the case when Lenin previously legalised abortion, suggesting a reduction in overall change for the better. Although, Stalin did put in place laws to punish such offence with two years imprisonment and made termination illegal.

However, ultimately the banning of abortion was an infringement on civil liberties, similar to that of Tsarism, reducing verall change. Additionally, Stalin reverted back to the traditional role of the women in the home. Whilst his changes meant they could work and could receive state support and were compensated by his promotion of the Women's Activists Movement their own family as a " good Communist" should rather than socialise the entire family as Lenin argued. Stalin therefore reverted back to the traditional view of the purpose of women. He however, gave them two roles.

Essentially, as Geoffrey Hosking argues " the fruits of female emancipation became the building blocks of the Stalinists neopatriarchal society. In terms of Stalins social policies and it's effects on children for the better, they are

arguably of less significance. Whilst Stalin continued to run the education system via the state as Lenin condoned, Stalin controlled the education of children to a precedent unseen before. Stalin condoned the more extensive regulation of education in order to shape the next younger generation of society, whom could be easily influenced, into the Communist way of thinking.

This was seen most notably in 1935, when Stalin brought the original Tsars Imperial Academy, or Soviets Academy of Sciences under direct state control forcing personnel to produce work only in line with Stalinist views. Stalin also reintroduced discipline into children's lives, giving power back to teachers which had previously been taken away under Lenin. He also further tightened the regulations imposed on children in terms of appearance, such as school uniforms, to surpass Lenin's attempts to create a truly egalitarian society.

Stalin also changed the material in lessons, introducing a new curriculum in 1935 which was created by the state which was accompanied by State prescribed textbooks through which children would now learn; a valuable method in the influencing of the next generation of socialists. Although, in retrospect, it could be argued that state influence in children's education was not a vast change. Lenin himself had requisitioned a book entitled A Brief History of Russia by Bolshevik Pokrovsky which was acquired as the Soviet School Text Book. Although, state influence in education under Lenin was rather in terms of class struggle.

Stalin changed this to an overall insight into the positive age of the Russian past, focussing on figures such as Peter the Great. He also made it compulsory along with homework and exams to in fact go to school. Whereas Lenin saw it as a mere obligation to learn the basic aspects of reading and writing, Stalin saw education as essential in breeding a new generation of productive and capable workers and consequently provided free schooling for the first time up to the age of 15. For example, between 1929 and 1940, the number of children attending school rose from 12 to 35 million.

Although, in retrospect, whilst there were grants, most parents of children in secondary education were still expected to pay and certainly could not attend higher education without such a financial contribution, reducing overall change in terms of opportunity for children. This change is made more insignificant by the fact that ironically, whilst the Russian revolutionaries had poured scorn on the bourgeoisie governing elites that monopolised power previously, Stalin continued to produce an equivalent and did not change this hypocrisy.

Party officials were allowed the right for their children to have the best training to give them access to higher education and were often given the best places, similar to the Tsarist elite, and going against Lenin. For example, in the period from 1928-1932, a third of all undergraduates were Party nominees. Essentially, Stalin did not change the existence of a ruling class which allowed their children to dominate the education system. Lynch even argues that, " it enhanced Stalins power by creating a class of his creatures. In conclusion, essentially, Stalin did make extensive changes in social policies which effected the lives of countless women and children.

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Authority, discipline and effort were now championed in a drive to become a truly independent Socialist State. In terms of children and their education, Stalin, although he continued with state intervention, undeniably made changes to allow compulsory education to all which made the literacy rate rise significantly from 51% in 1926 to 88% in 1940, allowing a new breed of educated workers to run the economy.

However, Stalin's changes to the lives of children are however inevitably undermined by the fact that he did nothing to prevent an intelligentsia forming once again which was allowed to dominate the nomenklatura. Not only was education still streamlined as it had been under Lenin and even under Tsarism in the universities, but ordinary children were still prevented from top posts and were confined to be "cogs" in the industrialisation process.