This script was awarded the following marks

Q10 51/60

Q12 50/60

Total 101/120

However it was then scaled up to achieve 118/120 UMS.

10. Each ruler of Russia ran their government differently, and Stalin was no exception. However, the other leaders of Russia also need to be considered.

In many ways it could be argued that the nature of Russian government changed little during this period – ‘History repeats itself, only behind new masks’. All of Russia’s governments, with the exception of the Provisional Government under Kerensky, were autocratic and willing to repress their opponents. This is clearly demonstrated by Nicholas II’s rigging of the elections for the 3rd and 4th Dumas. Lenin also suppressed democracy, closing down the constituent assembly in January 1918 after ‘one day of democracy’.

Both the Tsars and the communist rulers also showed no hesitation in the use of secret police and mass terror. Each regime had its own secret police – the Third Section under Alexander II, the Okhrana under Alexander III and Nicholas II, the Cheka, the NKVD and the KGB under the communists. The suppression of opponents was also a common practice throughout the period. Under the term of Pyotr Stolypin as Prime Minister (1906-11), hundreds of opponents were hanged – earning the hangman’s noose the nickname – ‘the Stolypin necktie’. Under high Stalinisim in the 1930s and 1940s, thousands were executed and up to 2.5 million ‘zeks’ sent to the Gulags of Siberia.

However, many individual rulers did much to change Russian government, despite the apparent similarities. Khrushchev for example, introduced ‘decentralisation’, which involved the creation of the Sovnarkhozy (regional governments). Alexander II also attempted to bring about some degree of devolution with the creation of the Zemstra (regional councils). However, the degree to which these limited reforms truly changed Russian government is questionable. Alexander II still held absolute power and was determined to uphold his autocracy. Khrushchev also carried on with many of Stalin’s repressive policies.

Under the Tsars, the nature of government changed little. The reign of Alexander III equated to little more than a reassertion of autocracy and his divine right to rule. Nicholas II’s ‘senseless dreams’ speech at the start of his reign clearly displayed that he was determined to uphold Tsarist autocracy in the way that his ‘late, unforgettable father’ had.

The greatest change to the nature of Russian government arguably occurred during the revolution of 1917. Russia had, in the space of less than a year, gone from a land led by the Romonsv Tsars chosen by God to rule, to the world’s first communist state. Lenin had suddenly transformed the world’s largest country into a state that, based on the ideas of Karl Marx, would eventually abolish government altogether. In terms of turning points in world history, the Russian revolution of 1917 is certainly the most significant since the French revolution in 1789. Lenin’s achievements, with the help of Leon Trotsky were by any standards incredible. However, Lenin’s successor, Stalin also needs to be considered.

While Russia clearly went under some huge changes under Stalin’s rule, with the introduction of the Five Year Plans and the policies of collectivisation and de-kulakization, the extent to which the nature of government changed under him is still open to question. In fact, since the opening up of the old Soviet archives since the end of the Cold War, many historians have come to the conclusion that much of what Stalin did was simply an extension of the same policies Lenin used, ‘all the ingredients of Stalinism, save one – the murdering of fellow communists Stalin learnt from Lenin and that included mass terror’. Indeed this view can be backed up by many examples, Lenin’s ruthless repression of the Kronstadt Rising in 1921 being one of them. Lenin showed no hesitation in executing or exiling opponents, the only real difference between Stalin and Lenin was the scale on which these kind of purges were carried out.

Overall, it would seem fair to suggest that very little fundamentally changed until the revolution of 1917. Each of the Tsars repressed or reformed as they saw fit, but only for the ultimate purpose of keeping hold of their power. Even the ‘Tsar Liberator’, as the contemporary writer Tolstoy described Alexander II, only ‘reformed from above’ in order to prevent a ‘revolution from below’. Tsars wished to preserve what they saw (or perhaps as the influential Pobedonestev saw) as their divine right to autocracy. Similarly, the communists saw their rule as an inevitable result of the class struggle, and hence were equally determined to hold on to their power every bit as the Tsars were. The key change in Russian government came in 1917. Going from a ‘land of the Tsars’ to a communist state meant that the entire focus and ideology of the government changed. This was a fundamental change, more so than any other event during this period. Therefore the man behind this change, Lenin, should be given credit as the ruler who did most to change the nature of Russian government during the period 1855-1964.

12. Like the other social groups in Russia during this period, the peasantry went through highs and lows. Whether or not their lives improved overall will be assessed in this essay.

There is certainly evidence to support the claim that the lives of the peasants did improve. During the reign of Nicholas II Prime Minister Stolypin introduced a series of reforms that ended the much hated redemption payments and allowed the peasants to leave their village without having to first obtain permission from the Mir. By doing this, Stolypin hope to create ‘a conservative bulwark of the status quo’ (R. Hingley). Similarly, Lenin introduced the NEP in 1921, enabling the peasants to ‘enrich themselves’ (Bukharin). Both of these reforms were largely successful and led to increases in output and living standards. However, Stolypin’s creation of a ‘kulak’ class of peasant and the ‘golden age’ of the peasantry under the NEP were both short lived affairs. Within a few years of Stolypin’s assassination in 1911, the peasant armies of Russia would be making the ultimate sacrifice in the First World War. The NEP was also short lived, being replaced in 1928 with something even more deadly than the First World War – collectivisation.

The Emancipation of 1861 was a reform that would supposedly help the peasants. However, despite being a ‘considerable achievement’ (D Christian); it had serious weaknesses. Despite being freed on a personal level from their landowners, they were in almost every case left with less land to farm. In return for this, they were saddled with 49 years of crippling redemption payments – many of which were based on land values for higher than their actual value. This supposedly well-intentional reform ultimately led to the peasants being worse off.

Under Khrushchev the Virgin Lands policy was introduced, with the aim, similar to emancipation, of improving the lives of the peasantry. However, this policy, introduced in 1956 turned out to be another of Khrushchev’s ‘hare brained schemes’. Despite once being a peasant himself, Khrushchev failed to fully comprehend the practicalities of what on paper seemed like a good idea – to turn the vast tracks of unused land west of the Urals and Kazakhstan into farm land. There was however, a reason why such land was never used before for farming, and after an initially successful harvest where crops from the ‘virgin land’ accountable for 25% of all agricultural output, a drought followed and the topsoil blew away.

As well as the short lived or failed government policies that concerned the peasants, there were also times when their suffering was even more obvious. Throughout the period, the Russian government showed no hesitation in exploiting the peasantry to whatever means they saw fit. Vyshnegradsky (Minister of France 1887-92) imposed his ‘monster tariff’ on the peasants of Russia declaring ‘we must go hungry, but export’. By ‘we’ he meant the peasants, and go hungry they did – the 1891 famine killed 2 million people.

The communists showed a similar, uncaring attitude towards the peasants. Under War Communism, grain requisitioning bands went out into the countryside to take practically all of the food belonging to the peasants. Again, the result was a famine, this time killing 5 million. If anything, things became even worse under Stalin, with the result of collectivisation being ‘the first man-made famine in history’, killing 15 million people (Conquest). The cases of famine during this period seem to show some degree of repetition – government exploitation resulting in the peasants suffering. This theme is also demonstrated by the episodes of war during this period. The Crimean War (1853-56), the Russo-Japanese War (1904-5) the First World War and the Second World War all involved predominantly peasant based armies. These wars were a showcase for Russia’s military and economic backwardness. In Stalin’s words, old Russia was ‘ceaselessly beaten’ and, in the First World War, being sent into battle without rifles, the consequences being tragic. In terms of the way in which the peasants were exploited, little changed during this period.

In conclusion, while there were certainly times when reforms led to an improvement in the lives of the peasants, they were either unsuccessful or short lived. What is clear is the fact that the peasants were consistently exploited over the entire period for military and economic gains, and this ensured that their lives did certainly not improve.