**10 “The nature of Russian government was changed more by Stalin than by any other ruler.” How far do you agree with this view of the period from 1855 to 1964?**

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’.

***Good focus on question***

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.

***Good***

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.

***Good***

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.

***Good***

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.

***Needs more on nature of Lenin’s govt. JP thinks differently***

***Change***

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.

***Better focus***

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.

***V. good understanding of key concepts- v. good explanation, focused on question***