Industrial, Agricultural And Economic Reforms Introduced By Joseph Stalin

Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin ruled the USSR from 1929 to his death on 5 March 1953. When Joseph Stalin came into power during 1929, he believed that the USSR was under threat from the West and at this time, the Soviet Union was primarily a peasant society. These peasants used archaic farming tools and methods, which proved problematic for the Soviet Union. Stalin attempted to resolve said agricultural problems via his policy of Collectivisation. This policy stated that in each area of farmland, farmers would have to amalgamate their tools, livestock and land to work together on a collective farm. Stalin believed that Soviet industrialisation was the key to make the USSR wealthy and strong, a necessity to protect the USSR from the West. Stalin planned to grow Soviet industry by implementing three five-year industrial plans. These three five-year plans aimed to transform the Soviet Union from an agrarian state into a modern industrial powerhouse. Stalin's purges drastically undermined the USSR's agricultural sectors. Stalin's rule transformed Russia from a peasant civilization to a global superpower, however this came at great cost to the people of the USSR.

Joseph Stalin's policy of Collectivisation stated that in each area of farmland, farmers would have to amalgamate their tools, livestock and land to work together on a collective farm and all cultivated grain was to be sold to and distributed by the government. This policy aimed to improve the efficiency of farming in the Soviet Union in order to generate monetary funds in order to finance Stalin's industrial plans. After the government obtained said grain, it would be sold at four times the price it was bought for from the peasants. Before Collectivisation, farmers would use the time worn three-field system of cultivation, one third of farmers ploughed their lands with wooden ploughs and half of the farmers reaped the harvest by hand, using sickles or scythes.

Kulaks opposed Collectivisation because their wealth was to be taken from them. The Kulaks protested against Collectivisation by burning their crops, destroying their tools and killing their livestock. The effect of these protests are seen by the 1.6 million tonne decrease in grain, the 3.4 million decrease cattle and 5.6 million decrease of pigs in the Soviet Union from 1928 to 1929. The Kulaks protested this way because they believed that it was unfair that the government was going to take away all that they had worked so hard to achieve and felt that if they could not keep their grain and livestock the government could not have it. Stalin's policy of Collectivisation was initially optional since it's introduction but was so unpopular amongst the kulaks that it became forced during 1929 and grain was now requisitioned by the government (Darya Gorodnicha, 2008). The kulak protests against Collectivisation and Stalin's decision to enforce Collectivisation indicate that Stalin's agricultural legislation and therefore his rule was a social failure.

Stalin decided to respond to the kulak protests against forced Collectivisation by introducing a policy known as Dekulakisation(27 December 1929), which stated that the kulaks were to be liquidated as a social class, and so 1.5 million Kulaks were all deported to labour camps or killed. The kulaks were Stalin's best and most effective farmers and their slaughter under Stalin negatively affected the Soviet agricultural output. The impact of Dekulakisation is seen in the decrease of Cattle (14.6 million), pigs (6.8 million) and sheep (38.2 million) in the Soviet Union

from 1929 to 1930. Stalin’s policy of Dekulanisation reduced agricultural output, which implies that Stalin’s rule was an agricultural failure. (Natalya Luck, 2014)

Much the requisitioned grain taken from the peasants was poorly distributed and therefore rotted due to poor planning. Those who withheld or stole grain from the violent requisitioning gangs were promptly shot. Collectivisation and Dekulakisation proved to be problematic for the Soviet Union as the grain production dropped from 73.3 million tons in 1928 to 67.6 in 1934. Stalin’s poor planning of agricultural legislature once again reinforces the notion that his rule was a failure from an agricultural perspective.

Due to the agricultural harm wrought by kulak protesting, Dekulanisation and Collectivisation the Soviet Union suffered the worst man made famine in history resulting in 5 to 6 million deaths (due to starvation) from 1930 (when over half the farms had been made into kolkhozes) to 1933 (Darya Gorodnicha, 2008). This famine and resulting loss of Soviet life confirms that while Stalin’s rule was a complete agricultural disaster he succeeded in driving peasants into the cities to join the industrial effort.

In 1927 the Gosplan (state planning commision) were instructed by Stalin to create a detailed economic plan for the Soviet Union over the next five years. On 1 October 1928, the Gosplan had produced the first five-year plan which focused on the development of coal, iron and steel, machine-tools, electric power and transport. This plan set specific output requirements for workers in all areas of the Soviet Union, if the workers of any area of the Soviet Union failed to meet these output requirements, they would be severely punished by being publicity criticized and humiliated. The first five-year plan did result in an increase in industrial output as shown by the increase in output of heavy industry in millions of tonnes before and after (December 31, 1932) the implementation of the first five-year plan, Oil 9.7, Steel 1.9, and Coal 28.9. Stalin’s industrial policy of the first five-year plan during his rule did result in an increase in industrial output in heavy industry, implying that his policies were an industrial success.

The first five-year plan was initially popular and such an initial success that Stalin decided that the industrial targets of the first five year plan were to be reached in four years instead of five. This change in the speed of the five-year plan resulted in the Soviet population growing an intense feeling of dislike toward the plan. Stalin’s industrial methods were unpopular however they were clearly efficient. Stalin’s first five-year plan contained social unrest (due to the change in speed from 5 years to 4 years), indicating that his industrial policies and therefore his rule were a social failure.

Stalin employed two more five-year plans in the years to come with each reaping similar industrial progress. Stalin’s industrial methods not only increased industrial output but also employment rates as in 1926 there were 6.4 million industrial workers employed in the Soviet Union but in 1939 23.7 million industrial workers were employed. The majority of these new employees were peasant farmers from the countryside. The cities began to become overcrowded due to the influx of peasants, each city flat had to be shared by numerous families and buses became stuffed to suffocation point. Stalin’s industrial plan increased employment but caused overcrowding showing that his industrial legislature had numerous positive and negative results.

Furthermore the five-year plans did negatively influence some factors of the USSR such as food processing and consumer good production. Skilled labourers were in high demand during the

implementation of the industrial plans and therefore were constantly changing jobs for higher pay. In order to reach set goals workers would often choose to produce a higher quantity of goods rather than a higher quality product, many consumer goods10 were produced at such a low quality that they could never be used (Young, 2015). Quantity of output increased but the quality of consumer goods decreased, showing the inefficiency of Stalin's industrial policies.

Stalin launched his second five-year plan in 1933 and once again the growth of heavy industry output was the main priority of the second five year plan. The second five-year plan greatly improved transportation related infrastructure. Childcare was introduced in order to allow the female Soviet population to contribute to the industrial success of the second five-year plan. Stalin did not allow sexist notions from allowing him to completely utilise the Soviet population for industrial growth, indicating that his industrial rule effectively improved Soviet industry.

Stalin also decided to introduce numerous policies in order to ensure that workers would reach the industrial goals set in each five-year plan. The first of the policies came about in 1929 named the uninterrupted week. This policy made it difficult for families to spend time with their loved ones. To discourage workers from taking unauthorised time off, workers that were away from work for one day were fired and evicted from factory housing. Worker discipline was so strict that workers would often not stay at one job for a long period of time always searching for better work. Stalin's labour legislation, harsh tardiness penalties and full working week, was effective but made him unpopular confirming that his industrial legislature were a social failure.

Some workers did believe in Stalin and in maintaining a high work ethic and would maintain a high level of industrial output and would often compete with each other, maintain working equipment, motivate others to follow their example and work even on rest days. These workers were known as Stakhanovites. The word Stakhanovite is derived from a coal miner named Alexei Stakhanov who worked in the Soviet Union. Alexei invented a completely new way from extracting coal from the coalface. Alexei's new method of coal mining required both skilled and unskilled labour. This new method of coal mining was extremely efficient in comparison to the old method; instead of the normal 7 tonnes of coal extracted in a single shift 102 tonnes was mined in a single shift. These Stakhanovites would receive benefits such as expensive housing, high pay, paid holidays and opera tickets. Stakhanovites were treated badly by their fellow workers and would often even be murdered resulting in workers doing the bear minimum to avoid danger. Stalin's Stakhonovites were few in number and underachieving was encouraged however Alexei Stakhanov's method of coal mining was a huge Soviet industrial success, proving that Stalin's industrial legislature were both riddled with both success and failure. (Stephen Cohen, 2008)

Often the industrial objectives in each five-year plan were so ambitious that the Soviet workers in the cities could not realistically reach said objective and so Stain decreed that prisoners in prison camps were to be tasked with completing the industrial work. These prisoners primarily consisted of kulaks, ordinary criminals, victims of the Great Purge and workers who could not meet industrial expectations. During 1930 a department of secret police known as the Gulag was created to run the Soviet slave labour camps. The first industrial project assigned to the Gulag slaves was the construction of the 500km Belomor Canal without machinery, the 300 000 zeks working on the canal were promised that they were to be set free after the canal was completed. The zeks worked long days regardless of weather conditions, they moved large rocks by hand, carted gravel in wheelbarrows and dug the ground with picks and shovels. This unforgiving menial labour made Stalin vastly unpopular amongst the zeks. The canal was

completed 20 months after the start of its construction during May 1933 but only 72 000 were released while the other 228 000 were transferred to work on other industrial projects. The intention of the of the canal was to provide the Soviet navy with an escape route from the Baltic sea, unfortunately the canal proved too shallow to be of any use to the Soviet Union (Stephen Cohen, 2008). Stalin's decision to further enslave the zeks after the completion of the Belomor Canal in conjunction with the impractical nature of the Canal further reduced his social reputation amongst the Gulag slaves because the zeks had been lied to by Stalin and the Canal was useless despite the heavy loss of human life.

When the first five-year plan was introduced by Stalin on 1 October 1928 there were 30 000 zeks but as a result of the plan there were 2 million zeks in 1932, 6 million in 1937 and 8 million in 1938. The worst labour camps were located in the Kolyma region in the north-east. In 1926, it was found that large deposits of gold and platinum were discovered underneath the frozen hard soil in the Kolyma region. A special Gulag branch named Dalstroy was set up in 1931 to organise the mining of valuable resources in the Kolyma region. Zeks in the Kolyma region were not allowed to excavate the gold and platinum with machines instead zeks would form groups and two zeks would light a bonfire while a third zek would bring ice to be melted. This would thaw the frozen ground and the zeks would then dig for gold and platinum. These methods resulted in Kolyma zeks mining 300 tonnes of gold a year (half of the world gold production per year). In addition to the standard poor conditions of zeks the cold temperatures of the Kolyma region would result in zeks often freezing to death with 20 percent of all zeks dying per year in 1938 and 12 million zeks dying from 1936 to 1950. The use of primitive methods by zeks to mine recources were a wasted opportunity by Stalin to fully utilise the Gulag slaves as a viable workforce. The high slave death rate and poor equipment worsened Stalin's image amongst the zeks. Stalin utilised the zeks to improve the nation however the death rate was high and some projects were a waste of time, showing that his industrial policies were both a success and failure while his reforms were a social failure. (Stephen Cohen, 2008)

Stalin's policies were clearly a huge industrial success for the USSR, massive increases in industrial production, higher employment rates and was initially socially well received, however, it clearly had a few negative aspects as well as posing his changes as a social failure as his industrial policies resulting in the alienation of the Soviet population.

Evidently, after examining all of the aforementioned evidence it is clear that while Stalin's policies were primarily an immense industrial success it came at great cost as Stalin transformed the USSR from an agrarian society to an industrial powerhouse. Stalin's legislature were a failure from an agricultural perspective due to his failure to modernise the agricultural sector, his vastly unpopular Collectivisation legislature, his slaughter of the USSR's best farmers and subsequent devastating famine. Stalin's reforms were also a partly a failure from social view due to his unpopular unrealistic industrial demands, worker regulations and policy of Collectivisation however Stalin did have some social success in his rule with his initial industrial growth. Stalin's rule was however, a great industrial success as he vastly improved industrial output and succeeded in transforming the USSR from a peasant society to an industrial superpower. This indicates that Stalin's rule was primarily a disaster for the USSR with the exception of the USSR's industrial success. Industrial success at the expense of 20 to 25 million civilians is no real success at all.