How far was there more change than continuity in the way Russia was ruled in the period from 1855 to 1964

It is possible to argue that there was more change than continuity in the way Russia was ruled from 1855 to 1964 due to the great change from Tsarist Monarchy and the reforms made under leaders like Alexander II and Nicholas II like the emancipation of the serfs and creation of a constitutional monarchy, to the Soviet leaders and their decrees and reforms like Lenin’s decree on land and Khrushchev’s Thaw. However, it can also be argued that there was more continuity than change due to the parallels between the Tsarist Autocracy and the Communist Dictatorships. This includes usage of secret please and repression against the people of Russia. Fundamentally, There was more continuity than change due to the similarities between the Tsarist reign and Soviet dictatorship in terms of repression and autocracy.

It is possible to argue that there was more change than continuity in the Autocratic nature rulers of Russia. Tsar’s like Alexander II lifted the largely autocratic nature of the Romanov rule by liberal reforms like the creation of Zemstvos which gave liberals a political platform for the first time. This is similar to Nicholas II’s creation of the Duma which gave certain people the right to vote. However, this argument doesn’t consider the limitations of the Zemstvos and Duma, with the Zemstvos having to real power to make change or pass laws while the Duma, and all the gains from the 1905 revolution was limited due to the fundamental laws. Additionally, there was great change going from the Romanov dynasty to the Bolshevik government. One such change was the introduction of the Sovnarkom, an elected government where there was universal suffrage for both men and women. This mirrors the duma but is much more progressive as more people could vote and it wasn’t limited by the Tsar’s involvement. Conversely, it can be argued that, in a similar fashion to the duma, the Sovnarkom was also limited to the fact that Lenin banned other parties and factions during and after the Russian Civil War. Additionally, the Sovnarkom only came into being due to the fact that Lenin disbanded the Constituent Assembly setup by the provisional government after the February revolution and dismissed it as a “bourgeoise institution”.  
On the other hand, it is possible to argue that there was more continuity than change in the Autocratic nature of Russian rulers. Alexander III successfully removed all his opposition after the assassination of his father, Alexander II. This meant his rule was un interrupted and he didn’t have to sacrifice power through reforms. This is very similar to Stalin’s rule where he created a one-man state, in a similar way to a Tsar, by purging huge elements of Russian society. This include successful farmers, known as kulaks, the Red Army and even the Communist party of Russia. However, Alexander III differs from Stalin as Alexander III mainly appears autocratic because he has no opposition while Stalin purged his own party and even went after people who weren’t directly opposition due to Stalin’s great paranoia, for example Doctors that were treating him were seen as Stalin as trying to kill him in the alleged Doctor’s Plot. Moreover, all governments had their own secret police. Alexander II had the Third Section, Alexander III and Nicholas II had the Ohkrana, Lenin had the Cheka, Stalin had the NKVD and Khrushchev had the KGB. This shows great continuity as all had organisations that were practically identical in operation, all setup to keep the respective leaders autocracy. Therefore, there was more continuity than change in the Autocratic nature of Russian rulers because of the almost identical parallels between the Tsarist government autocracy and the Communists government, who had ironically helped overthrown them.

It is possible to argue that there was more change than continuity in the way repression was used in Russia. For example, Alexander II’s reform of emancipation change the repressive nature of Russia by freeing around 20 million people from being what is effectively a slave. This approach was also taken by Lenin, who’s decree on land and redistributed the land from the Tsarist nobility amongst the peasantry of Russia. However the difference between this is that Alexander II emancipated the serfs due to him wanting to strengthen his own position by avoiding emancipation from below by emancipation by the Tsar and the terms of the emancipation were unfavourable to the serfs, with them losing two-thirds of the best land to nobles, whereas Lenin’s reform was an effort to help the peasantry by abolishing private ownership on land and was much more favourable to the peasantry than the ruling class, which Lenin sought to abolish. In addition, Khrushchev’s Thaw greatly reduced the repression throughout Russia by releasing hundreds of thousands of prisoners from Gulag camps. Khrushchev also improved the living standards to the people of Russia. However, it can be argued that he only did this to denounce his political rivals and to strengthen his own position as leader.   
On the contrary, there was more continuity than change in the way repression was used in Russia. One example of this is the usage of the army to put down revolts, which was used significantly under the Tsarist rule. The most well-known example of this is under Nicholas II, known as Bloody Sunday where the tsar brought in troops to quell a peaceful protest, which eventually resulted in a large-scale revolt. This is similar to Khrushchev’s handling of the 1956 Hungarian revolt where he brought I the Red Army to stop the protestors killing hundreds of people. Furthermore, the usage of assassinations or killing of opponents is used by most, if not all leaders in the period. For example, Alexander III’s killing of People’s Will members, like Lenin’s brother, Stalin killing all of the Old Bolsheviks, like Trotsky in the show trials, and Khrushchev having Beria killed. All of these leaders killed opposition to remain in power. Fundamentally, there was ,more continuity than change in the way repression was used in Russia as all Tsarist leaders were oppressive and all communist leaders were oppressive, with the possible exception of Lenin, who’s terror was in response to a national crisis.

In conclusion, when looking at the themes of repression and autocracy, the argument can be that tehre was change on a leader to leader basis. The most significant examples of this is the changes and reforms from Nicholas II to Lenin and also from Stalin to Khruschev, both of which reduiced autocracy and repression. However, throughout the period there was more contunit than change with the contiuted themes of Autocracy and repression appearing with each leader. The best example of this was the secret police used by each leader. Although they changed the name in an effort to show change from each leader, they always had the same task and purpose. . Therefore Fundamentally, there was more continuity in the period from 1855 to 1964.