The Rise & Fall of the Soviet Union 1917-1990

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Remember to answer the questions in grey thoughtfully
World History Honors
Background to the Russian Revolution of 1917

Oppressive Czars

- 1881, Czar Alexander III
  - Harsh ruler, repressed all dissenters, strict censorship, secret police censored all written documents (even private letters).
  - Universities carefully watched — teachers forced to report students.
  - Political prisoners sent to Siberia
  - Wanted Russia to have a uniform culture
  - Non-Russian groups oppressed
    - This was the age of the Pograms (attacks) against the Jewish communities
  - Non-Russian languages banned

- 1894, Czar Nicholas II
  - Continued policy of his father
  - Unpopular with the people

Revolutionary Spirit tied to Industry

- 1863-1900: Russia started to industrialize
  - Still behind the rest of Europe
  - People in factories unhappy with low wages, child labor, no unions, low standard of living, no political power.

- Revolutionary Groups compete for Power
  - Social Democrats (Marxists) grew popular
  - 1903, Split into Mensheviks (moderate) & Bolsheviks (radicals)

- Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, leader of the Bolsheviks
  - Brother had been killed by Alexander III for revolutionary activity — converted Lenin
  - Early 1900s planned to overthrow the czar
  - After 1917 Revolution known as “Father of the Revolution”
  - Body is still on display in Russia’s Red Square in Moscow.
Revolutionary Spirit tied to dissatisfaction with the government

- January 1905: Russia lost the Russo-Japanese War
  - Both countries were Imperialist and fought over control of Korea & Manchuria.
  - Russia wanted a warm water port on the Pacific.
  - Russians were mortified that such a small country could defeat their massive army.
  - Led to discontent and riots

- **Bloody Sunday**
  - Began with workers’ strikes
    - By January 8 St. Petersburg had no electricity & no newspapers.
    - 80,000 workers were on strike.
  - Sunday January 22, 1905: 200,000 unarmed workers and families brought a petition to Czar Nicholas at the Winter Palace
    - Better working conditions, personal freedoms, elected national legislature
    - Soldiers ordered to fire on the crowd
      - 1000+ wounded, 100s killed
  - Waves of strikes followed

- October 1905 Nicholas promises more freedoms to the workers
  - Against his will, he allowed the Creation of Duma (parliament)
    - Met May 1906.
    - Leaders were moderates who wanted a constitutional monarchy
    - Fearing a loss of power, Nicholas dissolved the Duma after 10 weeks.

- **World War I & The Abdication of Nicholas II**
  - Russia was unprepared for the military & economic cost of WWI
  - 4 million Russian soldiers killed, wounded, or taken prisoner
    - Showed weakness of the czarist regime (like Russo-Japanese War in 1905)
    - Russian soldiers began to mutiny in 1916
  - At home, food, fuel, etc. in short supply. Inflation. People believed that a mystic named Rasputin was really running the country, and was having an affair with the Czarina.
    - People demand an end to the War.
  - March 1917, Women textile workers in St. Petersburg led citywide strikes
    - 5 days of riots over shortages of bread & fuel
    - 200,000 workers protested for end to war & Nicholas II
    - At first soldiers obeyed and shot at crowds, then joined them. (See photos below)
  - Nicholas II stepped down.
    - Last Russian czar

June 19, 1917
St. Petersburg

The banner reads: "Down With The 10 Capitalist Ministers/ All Power To The Soviets Of Workers’, Soldiers’, And Peasants’ Deputies/ And To The Socialist Ministers/ [We Demand That Nicholas II Be Transferred To The Peter-Paul Fortress.”
How did the conditions in pre-Soviet Russia (20th century) mirror those at the start of the Industrial Revolution in Britain (18th century)?

The Provisional Government, 1917

- With the abdication of Czar Nicholas II, a new government had to be put into place.
- Leaders of the Duma set up a provisional government led by Alexander Kerensky
  - Led by Mensheviks (the Moderate half of the Social Democrats/Communists)
  - Kept fighting in WWI, against the wishes of Russian civilians
    - The Allies NEEDED Russia to stay in the war to keep Germany fighting on two fronts.
  - Conditions got worse
  - Lost support of soldiers & civilians

Why do you think the new Provisional government chose to stay in the war when so many Russians wanted Russia to pull out of it?

The Bolshevik Revolution/ The Communist Revolution

- Support shifted to the radical Bolsheviks (The Radicals)
- Slogan “Peace, Land, and Bread”
- November 1917 armed factory workers stormed the Winter Palace (Bolshevik Red Guard).
  - Took over government offices
  - Arrested leaders of provisional gov’t
- Lenin took power
  - All farmland distributed among peasants
  - Control of factories given to workers

A truly communist revolution!
• Treaty of Brest-Litovsk signed with Germany
  – Horrible Treaty for Russia.
  – Gave up Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Belarus, & Ukraine to fall under the German sphere of influence.
  – All Russian lands that had once been part of the Ottoman Empire had to be given back as well (parts of Georgia & Armenia)
  – Hundreds of thousands of German troops went to the Western front, immediately.
  – Russia was also required to pay 6 million marks to Germany for reparations.
    • (Most of this treaty fell apart just before the end of WWI & Russia did not have to pay).
    • Many Nationalists & Revolutionaries were furious with the Bolsheviks for signing this treaty.

• Civil War 1917-1921 begins.
  – After the collapse of the Mensheviks & the Provisional government, other leftist pro-revolutionary groups (The White Army) fought against the Bolsheviks (The Red Army) for control of Russia.
    • Many foreign armies joined the White Army including soldiers from the Allied Forces who hoped to defeat the Bolsheviks and bring Russia back into the war.
  – Most intense fighting 1918-1920, but some battles took place up to 1923!
  – Bolsheviks emerge victorious

The Beginning of the Soviet Era
• Lenin’s New Economic Policy (NEP)
  • The first few years of Soviet rule were marked by an extraordinary outburst of social and cultural change.
  • Although the Bolsheviks had maintained complete control of the economy during the civil war, Lenin decided at its end that a partial return to a market economy would help the country recover from the destruction of the previous three years.
  • His New Economic Policy, or NEP, brought about a period of relative prosperity, allowing the young Soviet government to consolidate its political position and rebuild the country’s infrastructure.
    • Farmers were to give 10% of production to state and sell any surplus on open market for profit.
    • Small private businesses were allowed to operate.
    • State controlled industry operated under capitalist notions such as: the profit motive, the right to dismiss workers, the right to reduce wages.
    • Trade passed into private hands (created a new middle class)
    • Currency reform w/ reintroduction of gold backing and balanced budgets
    • Confiscated property returned and loans made available to those willing to develop timber, oil and other resources.

Was it really a Communist Revolution?? Defend your answer.
• The innovation of the Soviet Era can also be seen in its art!
  • Although the country still faced enormous challenges, there was a widespread sense of optimism and opportunity.

Why do you think the Russian people felt this sense of optimism and opportunity? Explain.

Cultural Innovations!
• **The Avant-Garde**: art that departs from the existing norm in an original or experimental way.
• **Constructivism**: a modern art movement beginning in Russia that aimed to create abstract sculpture for an industrialized society. The movement utilized technology and building materials such as glass, plastic, steel and chrome.
• **Futurism**: Art movement which idealized mechanization and machinery.
• **Suprematism**: The object in itself is meaningless... the ideas of the conscious mind are worthless." What the artist wanted was a non-objective representation, "the supremacy of pure feeling."

Lable each piece of art on this page by the name that seems to match its style.
The Era of Optimism died with Lenin

1924: Lenin's death led to a Struggle for Power in the Communist Party
  • Stalin vs. Trotsky.

“Comrade Stalin, having become general secretary, has unlimited authority concentrated in his hands, and I am not sure whether he will always be capable of using that authority with sufficient caution. Comrade Trotsky, on the other hand, as his struggle against the Central Committee on the question of the People’s Commissariat has already proved, is distinguished not only by outstanding ability. He is personally perhaps the most capable man in the present Central Committee, but he has displayed excessive self-assurance and shown preoccupation with the purely administrative side of the work.” – Lenin on his death bed

Who did Lenin think of Trotsky? What did he think of Stalin? Who did he want to take over as the leader of the Communist party?

New Leadership for the Communist Party

Joseph Stalin

Born in Georgia, 1878 & named Iosif Vissarionovich Dzhugashvili
  • Adopted the last name Stalin = “Man of Steel”
  • Stalin was the better politician (not leader), and he influenced the right people in order to be named the head of the Communist Party in 1922-1953
    • Lenin had a series of strokes that kept him from leading the country.

End of the NEP. Beginning of 5-year plans
  • Rapid industrialization to meet goals set five years in advance.
  • No more capitalism – a true command economy.

Collectivization
  • All farm land was taken from individual peasants and collectively made into one large state owned farm.
  • Wealthier peasants (Kulaks) with more land were seen as the capitalists. They’re land was divided up equally among peasants but was owned by the state.
    • Kulaks had been the main suppliers of grain to cities.
  • The belief was that this would immediately increase the food supply for urban areas, the supply of raw materials for industry, & agricultural exports.
    • Viewed by some peasants as a revival of serfdom.
  • Small time farmers did not want to sell their food to the cities, and chose to eat it instead.
    • Available food declined.
• 1928: The Soviet government began grain seizures to stop the peasants from eating most of what they produced.
  o Peasants wound up with less than before the revolution.
• Farms were taken back by the government and turned into work camps.
  o Peasants rebelled by burning crops & slaughtering animals.
  o All this contributed to a great famine in 1932-1933
• **The Ukrainian Genocide (Holodomor)**
  o Ukraine = the bread basket of Russia to its rich soil.
  o Huge grain quotas to punish rebelling peasants.
  o As the famine struck, Stalin censored all news of it so nothing could be done to help those who were starving. Stalin also controlled movement; people living in the hardest hit areas were not allowed to leave the area.
  o 40 million people impacted by food shortages.
    ▪ Near Moscow 50% of the population perished.
    ▪ Ukraine was the center of the famine.
      • 1.54 million officially registered deaths in Ukraine.
      • Some claim it was closer to 4 million; others say 7 million.
• **Purges**
  • All opposition or possible opposition killed/sent to Siberia (millions)
  • So many former WWI generals were purged that it harmed Russia in WWII
• **Censorship**
  • Only one state written newspaper was allowed, “Pravda,” which means “truth”
    • It contained anything BUT the truth.
  • Photographs were edited to remove enemies, as if they never existed.

→ **Commissar Yezhov disappears**

→ **Trotsky removed from the stairs near Lenin**
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**Religion repressed**
- Marx had called religion the “Opiate of the Masses.” It was also discouraged to remove power from the clergy.

**Cult of Personality created** – Stalin as God
- Reflected in the art of the time period: Soviet Realism.
  - To proletarianize the arts – to create expressions that would be understood immediately by the masses and inspire them to carry out the goals of the revolution. All other forms of art were thought of as Bourgeois and irrelevant.

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**By the 1930s: totalitarianism replaced experimentalism**

- **WWII**
  - Unprepared
  - Purges stripped military of leaders
  - Industrial production slow to convert to military production
- **1939 Non-aggression Pact with Germany**
  - Neither side was ready for a full on war. Germany & the Soviet Union agreed to divide Poland and leave each other alone.
    - Neither planned on staying peaceful forever, this was to buy time.
- **June 1941-1945: War with Germany**
  - Surprise German invasion, but USSR prevailed
- **After WWII**
  - 20,000,000 dead
  - Land gained
  - Status as a super power.
  - Agriculture & Industry continue to suffer
  - Political liberties restricted further
  - More purges
- **The Cold War led to worse conditions**
- 1953: Stalin died of a brain hemorrhage

**Summarize how life became dramatically worse under Joseph Stalin.**
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Who was more of a real Marxist communist, Lenin or Stalin? Explain your answer.

The Soviet Union After Stalin

- **Nikita Khrushchev** took power after Stalin’s death
  - Repressive policies that Stalin had instituted were dismantled.
  - Political controls were to some degree relaxed.
  - Cultural life experienced a brief period of revival.

- **1970s - 1982, Leonid Brezhnev**
  - In 1964 Khrushchev was ousted by his opposition within the party.
    - Khrushchev was permitted to quietly retire.
  - Brezhnev’s rule was marked by an emphasis on domestic stability and an aggressive foreign policy.
  - The country entered a decade-long period of stagnation.
    - Rigorous economy deteriorating.
    - Political climate increasingly pessimistic.

- **March of 1985, Mikhail Gorbachev**
  - The need for reforms was pressing.
  - Plan for a new Soviet Union.
    - Glasnost (openness) & perestroika (restructuring).
  - The Economy.
    - Wanted to revitalize it by loosening social & economic controls.
    - Room for new ideas.
  - Ending Corruption.
    - Started by firing many corrupt officials and starting investigations into others.

- **Chernobyl & Gorbachev’s loss of credibility.**
  - April 1986, a nuclear reactor at Chernobyl (in Ukraine) had a melt down releasing dangerous radioactive material over a large part of the USSR.
  - The Soviet government waited several days before admitting it had taken place.
  - The government only admitted it when radiation detectors
in other countries indicated something horrible had happened & the Soviet Union was forced into a corner.

- Due to his policy of Glasnost, Gorbachev had no choice but to allow free media coverage of the event.
  - First time that problems in the Soviet Union were discussed openly in decades: poverty, corruption, poor management of resources, the unpopularity of the Afghan War (imperialist, but similar to our Vietnam War), etc.
- Radical reform leaders had their voices heard for the first time.
  - New Moscow Party chief Boris Yeltsin
  - Dissidents like Andrei Sakharov (nuclear physicist, human rights activist, political critic).
- Soviet gov’t was the target of most criticism.
  - Could no longer control it.

The End of the Soviet Union & the downfall of Gorbachev

1989: Soviet Reforms

- Early in 1989, Soviet troops were withdrawn from Afghanistan & the first open elections since 1917 with more than one candidate running for each position.
- Communist countries in Eastern Europe (controlled by the Soviet Union) stated to be toppled by revolutions.
  - The Fall of the Berlin Wall was one of them!

1990: The Soviet Union begins to Unravel

- Soviet Republics began to issue declarations of independence.
- Boris Yeltsin named head of Parliament & encouraged independence movements.
- Large scale strikes in cities showed that the Communist Party was not protecting worker’s rights.
  - The economy worsened, food shortages became a problem

1991: Radical reform & the decline Gorbachev’s power continues

- crime rate began to skyrocket as economy declined.
- The people want more radical reforms; the Communist government wants controls put back in place.
  - Gorbachev can’t win!
- Major protests by radical reform movements.
- Press continued to criticize Gorbachev.
- June: Yeltsin elected President! The first non-Communist since 1917!
• August: Conservatives try to take control by arresting Gorbachev & try to force him to impose martial law. Yeltsin taking office would be the end of their power.
  • Gorbachev forced to resign.
  • Attempted Coup by conservatives
    • Military sent out to enforce martial law
    • Huge protests led by Yeltsin and presidents of new republics
    • Coup ends in 3 days
  • Gorbachev was reinstated as president but powerless.

The End of the Soviet Union
• By the end of the year the Soviet Union had been voted out of existence, to be replaced by a Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).
• On December 25, Gorbachev resigned, and on midnight of December 31, the Soviet flag atop the Kremlin was replaced by the Russian tricolor flag.

Why did Gorbachev’s reforms of Perestroika & Glasnost bring about the end of the Soviet Union?

Was Gorbachev a good leader or a bad one? Explain your answer.