

E. The Russian Revolution (1917) and Rise of Communism

1. During the “century of humiliation,” Russians were always asking the question “What is to be done?” They did not know how to become as strong and advanced as Europe.
2. Vladimir Lenin believed he had the answer. They would create a form of government where the leaders commanded the necessary progress of the nation. His idea is known as “communism.”
 - a) Communism is based on Marxism—a theory of history of German philosopher Karl Marx.
 - b) Marx said that people are either born rich and powerful *or* poor and powerless, and that these two groups are always fighting.
 - c) Marx believed that eventually this great struggle would lead to a new stage of history, where everyone lives in perfect equality and harmony.
 - d) Marx believed his version of a perfect future it was coming, but it would arrive in more advanced societies like England first.
 - e) The problem for Vladimir Lenin was that although he believed in Karl Marx, he was impatient to bring progress to Russia. He didn’t want to wait for history! He wanted to make Russia successful right away. That’s why he advocated “communism,” a kind of government where he would lead and forced everyone else to live the proper way, which would supposedly guarantee progress and prosperity.
4. In **1917**, when Russia had suffered terrible losses in World War I, Lenin and his supporters took over from the Tsar in the ***Russian Revolution***.

F. The Evils of Communism

1. Lenin and the communists forced the country’s farmers to give their crops to the government. Those who resisted were either slaughtered or enslaved to work in state factories, or shipped off to prison camps called “gulags.”
2. Because of this, not enough food was produced, and there was a famine in 1921, which claimed 5 million lives, and another in 1930, which claimed perhaps 8 million more dead.
3. When things didn’t work, the rulers blamed the people for not being good enough (because, of course, the *idea* of communism was “perfect,” and the rulers were doing the “right” thing, so who else could be blamed other than the backward Russians themselves!)
4. In 1937, Lenin’s successor Joseph Stalin killed 1 million more Russians, in order to keep all power for himself. In every way since it was created, Russian communism was like absolute monarchy, where the communist leaders have total power and are totally corrupt.

G. World War II and the Communist Empire

1. Even though terrible things were happening in Russia, World War II soon became much more important.
2. As supernationalist Germany prepared to attack its neighbors once again Joseph Stalin made a deal to try to avoid being dragged into the war. It was called the “non-

aggression” treaty with Germany. As part of the deal, Germany would conquer the western part of Poland, and the Soviet Union would conquer the eastern part. (Obviously this was not really “non-aggression” as far as Poland was concerned!)

3. Just like Russia’s deal with Napoleon, this one broke down and Germany invaded Russia.
4. This time the human cost of defending Russia totaled 24 million dead!
5. In a temporary military alliance with the United States and others, however, Russia was ultimately victorious in Eastern Europe.
6. As Russian troops moved towards Germany in the east, they occupied all of Eastern Europe, and soon forced the people there to accept communism as well.

H. The Cold War

1. From 1945 to 1991, the United States and the Soviet Union/Communist Russia were locked in a “cold war”—a situation which is not the same as peace, because both sides are constantly ready to fight and worried about being attacked, and yet they do not actually fight a “hot war” (a war where weapons are actually fired).
2. During the Cold War, Russian leaders continued to believe that communism would ultimately create a better society. They put the first satellite into space (the Sputnik) and the first man (Yuri Gagarin), but Russia was still a country where people experienced famines, and people generally did not have enough to eat.
3. On average, Americans were 2-3 richer than Russians during the Cold War, and by the end of the Cold War it was 4-5 times.
4. Russian leader Mikhail Gorbachev decided that Russia should try to combine communism and freedom, but when Russia abandoned control over eastern Europe the Russians also demanded the end of communism.
5. By 1991, the Soviet Union was at an end. The only question was what kind of Russia would emerge...

I. Vladimir Putin’s Post-Communist Russia

1. From 1991 to 2000, it was not clear what Russia would become, and then Vladimir Putin became the “president” of Russia, and he has been in charge ever since.
2. Putin is the charismatic leaders Russians want to decide the direction for the country.
3. The war in Ukraine is a demonstration, however, that Putin has no good answers. He wants Russia to continue to be a cardinal culture, but now he has made enemies of Ukraine, Europe, America, and all their allies.
4. The worst part is that Ukraine will be ruined in the process.
5. Until Vladimir Putin dies or is removed from power there is no chance that Russia will be able to change in any good way. It is stuck being *post-communist* and not knowing how to fit into the world.