

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

1. Ever since Peter the Great, Russia had been trying to become more of a European country, and to match its neighbors' level of development. By World War I, it still had not achieved that aim.
2. During the "century of humiliation," educated Russians had constantly asked the question "What is to be done?" in desperate recognition of Russia's inability to match Europe.
3. 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 and human nature put forward by German philosopher Karl Marx, which says that people are either born rich and powerful *or* poor and powerless, and that these two groups are always fighting.
 - b) Marx believed that eventually this great struggle would lead to a new stage of history, where everyone lives in perfect equality and harmony, according to the rule "*from each according to his ability, to each according to this need.*" This outcome is sometimes called "socialism."
 - c) Marx believed his version of a perfect future it was historically inevitable, and that it would arise some day in the most advanced societies.
 - d) 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 to bring socialism to Russia. He wanted to make Russia socialist 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.
 - e) In **1917**, when Russia had suffered terrible losses in World War I, and different groups in Russia were working to replace the Tsar, Lenin and his supporters took charge and directed the event known as the ***Russian Revolution***.

F. The Evils of Communism

1. Lenin and the communists demand that everyone accept the principles of socialism. This meant that all property was "collectivized." (There was no more private property, and everything belong to all of society.) Peasants were commanded to farm the land on behalf of the nation as a whole, and those who resisted were either slaughtered or enslaved to work in state factories, or shipped off to prison camps called "gulags."
2. The forced collectivization of agriculture almost destroyed Russia, but the United States shipped supplies to Russia and saved as many as 11 million lives because of it. Sadly, this did not prevent a famine in 1921, which claimed 5 million lives, and another in 1930, which claimed perhaps 8 million more dead.
3. Everyone who survived was forced to live under communism as well, which became even more oppressive, because every time things didn't work out, the rulers blamed the people for not being good enough (because, of course, the *theory* 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 enacted the “Great Purge”—killing and imprisoning about 1 million political opponents, including former political allies. 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 (this time under the leadership of Adolf Hitler) 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.
7. Only because the United States decided to become the “world police power” was Russia prevented to conquering all of Europe, which had nearly ruined itself by the war.

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. When Russia took an early lead in the “space race,” by putting the Sputnik satellite in space in 1957 and then the first man in space—Yuri Gagarin—in 1961, it seemed like communism was successful in at least that way, 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 times as rich as Russians during the Cold War, and by the end of the Cold War it was 4-5 times. Russia was clearly falling behind.
4. This created a new problem for communists. Russian leader Mikhail Gorbachev decided that Russia should begin reforms in order to create a combination of 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 in the year 2000, 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 it will be excluded from the America-centric world and impoverished by lack of trade. (If Russia wanted to stay in the British-centric world of trade despite Napoleon, the importance of being in the America-centric world of trade is even greater today.)
4. Russia will now be viewed as an enemy by Ukraine, Europe, the United States, and all their allies in the world.
5. Sadly, Ukraine will be ruined in the process.
6. 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.