

## Modern Europe Assignment #3

### The Rise and Fall of Classical Communism

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A new idea, a new theory, a new workflow, a new project – these eventually lead to the creation of a plan. Now imagine developing this new idea while being surrounded by others far ahead of you. This is what the Five-Year Plan essentially was. Joseph Stalin, a leader of the Soviet Union (USSR), implemented a plan to quickly industrialize the USSR to catch up to other major countries economically. Some foreign countries saw it as a failure, while others saw an opportunity for the USSR to catch up. Within and after this time, Stalin's rule became extremely dictatorial and led to countless crimes. The Five-Year Plan, Stalin's crimes, and the fall of communism will be discussed throughout this essay.

Stalin's purpose of the Five-Year Plan was to industrialize the Soviet Union. He was adamant about industrializing quickly. The communist regime of the Soviet Union was mostly agrarian – industrializing would greatly boost their economic standing and thus raise them into a major industrial state. In Stalin's "The Tasks", he states how

“slacken[ing] the tempo would mean falling behind. And those who fall behind get beaten. But we do not want to be beaten” [1]. He also mentions that “It is the jungle law of capitalism. You are backward, you are weak – therefore you are wrong; hence you can be beaten and enslaved. You are mighty – therefore you are right; hence we must be wary of you” [1]. Stalin’s reason for making the industrialization process as quick as possible was to crawl out of the danger zone of weak countries. During the age of imperialism, it was clear that many “weak” countries would be easily imperialized, indoctrinated, and made into a colony of larger capitol states. There is truth in that weak countries are defeated because they allow themselves to be overpowered by major industrial states. However, Stalin is using this statement as a defense on his dictatorship, trying to steer away our attention from the inner workings of the country outwards into the threats posed by the major industrial states. To gain industrial power quickly would render you an easy target no more while increasing the threat you have towards other countries, specifically the capitalists. In “The Results”, Stalin describes the early results of the quick industrialization of the Soviet Union known as the Five-Year Plan. “We did not have an iron and steel industry, the basis for the industrialisation of the country. Now we have one. We did not have a tractor industry. Now we have one. We did not have an automobile industry. Now we have one. We did not have a machine-tool industry. Now we have one. We did not have a big and modern chemical industry. Now we have one. We

did not have a real and big industry for the production of modern agricultural machinery. Now we have one. We did not have an aircraft industry. Now we have one. In output of electric power we were last on the list. Now we rank among the first. In output of oil products and coal we were last on the list. Now we rank among the first” [2]. In summary, the plan was successful and gained the Soviet Union many resources, and even a large momentum in production and economic growth to further increase their military and world presence. However, some countries thought it was a failure while others thought it had potential to succeed even more. Those praising the plan seemed to want a piece in the growth, attempting to commercially co-operate with the Soviet Union due to the prospective economic success of the plan.

Contrary to the passion and success of this Five-Year Plan to rapidly industrialize the Soviet Union into a world power, Stalin has led in a very dirty fashion that would ultimately define the government as dictatorial. Most of the crimes he committed are outlined in Krushchev’s Secret Speech. According to Krushchev, he “acted not through persuasion, explanation, and patient cooperation with people, but by imposing his concepts and demanding absolute submission to his opinion” [3]. This is a precursor to his reign of terror, eliminating anyone who may have a rather opposite or slightly different opinion than Stalin. He would torture innocent people and fabricate cases on them that would eventually lead to their execution. In Krushchev’s view, Stalin’s initial methods of

absolute dictatorship were increased in magnitude after the second World War. “Stalin became even more capricious, irritable, and brutal” [3], and so this resulted in his increased paranoia of who is the enemy of the Soviet Union, separating himself from his own people and being a selfish, self-glorifying dictator. The consequences of Stalin’s crimes are numerous. Firstly, he thinned down his on military and political worker population just by executions. With this, the people’s trust in him was lost, and more importantly those in higher positions in the Soviet Union despised him. Eventually it would lead to a crumble within the government and a weakened state overall.

Following the unfortunate dictatorial reign of Joseph Stalin, the state of the Soviet Union and European Communism began to slowly fall from its high. On December 25, 1991, the collapse of the Soviet Union was announced by Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev. According to “World History EDU, The Collapse of the Soviet Union: History and Facts”, the fall of the Soviet Union was due to multiple reasons. One reason why was because soviet leaders “believed that by having a strong military[, it] would keep the country stable and prosperous” [5]. This belief would shift focus from economic growth into militarism, on top of Stalin’s terrorizing acts and crimes against his own people. On the economic side, the Soviet Union had “a per capita income that was about half that of the United States”, and “there was a huge gap between the USSR and the US in terms of US in terms of productivity and output” [5]. Additionally, the quality of Soviet Union

products were not as good as the US, and were behind on “technological advancements, labor productivity, healthcare, housing, and agriculture” [5]. The whole “success” and purpose of the Five-Year-Plan was to rapidly industrialize – it ultimately did not help the Soviet Union catch up later on. Mikhael Gorbachev himself says that “the Soviet model was defeated not only on the economic and social levels; it was defeated on a cultural level. Our society, our people, the most educated, the most intellectual, rejected that model on the cultural level because it does not respect the man, oppresses him spiritually and politically” [5]. This fact is backed up on that fact that Stalin ruled on terror, and the people felt oppressed, ruining the entire purpose of Communism. There were definitely attempts to reform Communism back to the Lenin ideal after the mess that Stalin left on the Soviet Union. Gorbachev would attempt to end the feeling of oppression by allowing free speech. With free speech and expression of opinions, more ideas were talked about and would eventually lead to examining the disadvantages of Communism. There was also a shift from a planned economy to a market economy, which is a capitalist economy. This attempted “hybrid” of Communism and Capitalism was beyond stable and so the ideal Communism state would fall apart. Finally, Gorbachev “ordered the scaling down of Soviet troops to a more manageable level” in “its various satellite republics” [5]. This downscale military presence would decrease the presence of Communism in Europe and

thus the efforts to dispel democratic ideas dwindled. These attempts to reform the Soviet Union were naturally causing the fall of European Communism itself.

## References

- [1] <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1931/02/04.htm>
- [2] <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1933/01/07.htm>
- [3] <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1956khrushchev-secret1.html>
- [4] <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/aug/16/ghorbachev-guardian-interview>
- [5] <https://www.worldhistoryedu.com/collapse-of-the-soviet-union-history-major-facts/>