Modern Europe Assignment #3

The Rise and Fall of Classical Communism

J. Lewis, Instructor – Spring 2024

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Due May 22, 11:59PM

“The Tasks of Economic Executive” & “The Results of the First Five-Year Plan” Parts I, II, and III:

* Discuss the reasons given by Stalin in “The Tasks” as to why it was imperative that the Soviet Union industrialize as quickly as possible
  + To slacken the tempo would mean falling behind. And those who fall behind get beaten. But we do not want to be beaten. No, we refuse to be beaten! One feature of the history of old Russia was the continual beatings she suffered because of her backwardness. She was beaten by the Mongol khans. She was beaten by the Turkish beys. She was beaten by the Swedish feudal lords. She was beaten by the Polish and Lithuanian gentry. She was beaten by the British and French capitalists. She was beaten by the Japanese barons. All beat her — because of her backwardness, because of her military backwardness, cultural backwardness, political backwardness, industrial backwardness, agricultural backwardness. They beat her because it was profitable and could be done with impunity. You remember the words of the pre-revolutionary poet: "You are poor and abundant, mighty and impotent, Mother Russia." **[4](https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1931/02/04.htm" \l "4)** Those gentlemen were quite familiar with the verses of the old poet. They beat her, saying: "You are abundant," so one can enrich oneself at your expense. They beat her, saying: "You are poor and impotent," so you can be beaten and plundered with impunity. Such is the law of the exploiters — to beat the backward and the weak. 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.
  + In the past we had no fatherland, nor could we have had one. But now that we have overthrown capitalism and power is in our hands, in the hands of the people, we have a fatherland, and we will uphold its independence. Do you want our socialist fatherland to be beaten and to lose its independence? If you do not want this, you must put an end to its backwardness in the shortest possible time and develop a genuine Bolshevik tempo in building up its socialist economy. There is no other way. That is why Lenin said on the eve of the October Revolution: "Either perish, or overtake and outstrip the advanced capitalist countries." We are fifty or a hundred years behind the advanced countries. We must make good this distance in ten years. Either we do it, or we shall go under. That is what our obligations to the workers and peasants of the U.S.S.R. dictate to us.
* Discuss what were the early results of Stalin’s policy as expressed in his speech on “The Results”
  + 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.
  + We had only one coal and metallurgical base — in the Ukraine — and it was with difficulty that we made do with that. We have not only succeeded in improving this base, but have created a new coal and metallurgical base — in the East — which is the pride of our country.
  + We had only one centre of the textile industry — in the North of our country. As a result of our efforts we shall have in the very near future two new centres of the textile industry — in Central Asia and Western Siberia.
* In your opinion, was Stalin merely justifying his own ruthless dictatorship or was there any truth in his claim that in the modern world, “weak countries became defeated countries” at the hands of the major industrial states?
  + In my opinion, Stalin was doing both justifying his own ruthless dictatorship and speaking the truth. 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.
* According to Stalin’s speech, how did the rest of the world view the results of the Five Year Plan?
  + Some thought it was a failure while others thought it had potential. Those praising the plan seemed to want a piece in the growth, attempting to commercial co-operate with the U.S.S.R. due to the prospective success of the plan.

“Khrushchev Secret Speech”:

* What were Stalin’s crimes?
* Why in Krushchev’s view did Stalin behave in this manner?
* What were some consequences of those crimes?

“2011 Interview with Mikhail Gorbachev” & “World History EDU, The Collapse of the Soviet Union”:

* Examine the fall of European Communism and of the USSR by the early 1990s
* Discuss how and why attempts to reform Communism failed.