Modern Europe Assignment #3

The Rise and Fall of Classical Communism

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The Rise and Fall of Classical Communism

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.

“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?
  + Stalin acted not through persuasion, explanation, and patient cooperation with people, but by imposing his concepts and demanding absolute submission to his opinion. Whoever opposed this concept or tried to prove his viewpoint, and the correctness of his position-was doomed to removal from the leading collective and to subsequent moral and physical annihilation. This was especially true during the period following the 17th party congress, when many prominent party leaders and rank-and-file party workers, honest and dedicated to the cause of communism, fell victim to Stalin's despotism
  + Now when the cases of some of these so-called spies and saboteurs were examined it was found that all their cases were fabricated. Confessions of guilt of many- arrested and charged with enemy activity were gained with the help of cruel and inhuman tortures
* Why in Krushchev’s view did Stalin behave in this manner?
  + We must state that after the war the situation became even more complicated. Stalin became even more capricious, irritable, and brutal; in particular his suspicion grew. His persecution mania reached unbelievable dimensions. Many workers were becoming enemies before his very eyes. After the war Stalin separated himself from the collective even more. Everything was decided by him alone without any consideration for anyone or anything.
  + Comrades, the cult of the individual acquired such monstrous size chiefly because Stalin himself, using all conceivable methods, supported the glorification of his own person
  + the most dissolute flattery, an example of making a man into a godhead, of transforming him into an infallible sage, "the greatest leader," "sublime strategist of all times and nations."
* What were some consequences of those crimes?
  + Thinning of military commanders and political worker populations, increased paranoia, disconnect between Stalin and the system/people.

“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
  + The collapse of the Soviet Union was officially announced by then-Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev in a speech on December 25, 1991. Gorbachev told his countrymen and countrywomen that a new era was dawning and that the Soviet Union had to evolve in order to keep up with times. That same day, the famous sickle and hammer Soviet flag was taken down, and its place the Russian Federation flag was flown above the Kremlin in Moscow.
  + Gorbachev tendered his resignation as president of the Soviet Union. The Central Committee was dissolved, and activities of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union were banned.
  + Soviet leadership, especially under dictator Joseph Stalin, somehow believed that by having a strong military would keep the country stable and prosperous. Stalin’s time in power was an absolutely horrific period for the Soviet Union, as the economy wasn’t the only thing his people worried about. Stalin built built the Soviet Empire on terror, moral decadence and lies.
  + As at the late 1980s, the USSR had a per capita income that was about half that of the United States’. There was a huge gap between the USSR and the US in terms of productivity and output. The quality of quality of consumer goods and services was years behind the U.S. and its Western allies. The United States also outperformed the Soviets in terms of technological advancements, labor productivity, healthcare, housing, and agriculture. From the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s the USSR’s economy was between 50 and 57 percent of US economy.
  + “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.” – Mikhail Gorbachev
* Discuss how and why attempts to reform Communism failed.
  + Gorbachev wanted to bring an end of the era of oppression by encouraging his countrymen and countrywomen to freely express their opinions. As a result, the Soviet leadership opened themselves up to scrutiny and criticism as people no longer had to dread being sent to prison or exiled.
  + Shift from planned economy to a market economy (capitalist economy)
  + The thing about having a centralized economy the size of the USSR is that it is very difficult to govern effectively. The Soviet Union was so large that the core became unstable over time and thereafter collapsed inward upon itself. This caused the Union’s outer satellite republics to be blown away, so to speak. During Gorbachev’s time in office, Moscow began scaling down its troops presence in its various satellite republics.
  + As part of his economic liberalization policies, Gorbachev ordered the scaling down of Soviet troops to a more manageable level. This was also necessitated by the political and military fallouts from the Soviet-Afghan War.
  + It had become clear as day that the Red Army wasn’t the invincible army that it thought itself to be. Moscow therefore hoped to restructure the Soviet military to make it more effective.
  + Due to military budget cuts and scale down of troops, Moscow did not have the appetite or political will to quell pro-democracy and anti-communists protests and movements within the Soviet Union.

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/gorbachev-guardian-interview>

[5] <https://www.worldhistoryedu.com/collapse-of-the-soviet-union-history-major-facts/>