

The Soviet Experiment

By 1921, the Communists led by Trotsky and Lenin had defeated all political and military opposition within Russia.

The Communist Party of the Soviet Union would remain in power until 1991.

Lenin insisted that the vanguard (himself) was establishing the “**dictatorship of the proletariat**” that Marx explained would facilitate the transition to communism.

Political decisions were made in a **nondemocratic** manner at the top. In other words, even if the economic policies aimed at equality, the political process was never equal to begin with.

*It will be important to distinguish between the *political* and *economic* policies of the Soviet Union when assessing “socialism” or “Marxism” or “communism” as a threat to the West.

During the civil war (1918-1921), Lenin implemented **War Communism**, which involved the government taking over major industries and centrally planning production for the war effort.

In 1921, discontented peasants rebelled, but they were violently crushed by the Red Army.

The Cheka (secret police) continued to repress political opposition, as well.

After the 1921 peasant rebellion Lenin shifted from War Communism to the **New Economic Policy (NEP)**, which allowed *private ownership* of property and the selling of goods on the open market. The Soviet Union was now a land of small farms and small businesses.

The Communist Party of the Soviet Union founded the **Third International**, known as the **Comintern**, which spreads the Bolshevik model of socialism outside of the Soviet Union. The Comintern aimed to *destroy democratic socialism* as an alternative to **Leninism**.

Result: Socialist parties throughout Europe split over the Soviet Union and socialism is no longer a united political force. Furthermore, right-wing opponents begin labeling all socialists as “communists” in the Leninist sense (sound familiar?)

In 1924, Lenin dies...

Leon Trotsky and Joseph Stalin compete for power and offered opposing plans for industrialization.

Trotsky was left-wing and urged rapid industrialization and voluntary collectivization of farming by poor peasants.

Stalin was right-wing and urged the continuation of Lenin's NEP, which involved slow industrialization.

By 1927, Trotsky was exiled to Siberia and Stalin had taken power.

Stalin proceeded to push for rapid industrialization and the abandonment of NEP!

Industrialization took place in a series of **five-year plans** formulated by the government, which set goals for production in every area of economic life.

The five-year plans favored major industrial projects rather than consumer goods.

IRONY ALERT: The new industrial labor force was crowded into poor housing with inadequate sanitation and experienced *worse living and working conditions* than Marx criticized during the 19th century!

Commie-haters: “See...communism is horrible...capitalism is awesome!”

DOUBLE-IRONY-ALERT: The living and working conditions of the new industrial labor force resembled the early stages of laissez-faire industrial capitalism before government began to regulate and reform capitalism to make it work better for society as a whole!

Commie-haters: “Whatever...you’re still a commie if you think government should regulate capitalism...capitalism is just, like, the best...”

The Communist Party used propaganda to manufacture public support for industrialization and modernization.

The five-year plans worked pretty well considering that the Soviet Union's industrial production rose *400 percent* between 1928 and 1940.

Industrialization was accompanied by **urbanization** and agricultural production was forced to meet the growing demand in the cities.

The agricultural policies of the NEP (small land-owners) proved inefficient and Stalin decided to **collectivize agriculture** in order to produce enough food for domestic consumption and exportation.

Collectivization involved the replacement of private peasant farms with huge state-run and state-owned farms called collectives.

Commie-haters: “**OMG! That is horrible! Those commies took the peasants private property and created STATE-OWNED farms instead...**the only thing that could be worse is if small privately-owned farms were replaced by huge industrial farms privately owned by a few wealthy individuals unaccountable to the public who used their wealth to control the government behind-the-scenes...I'm like...so glad...that I am free...”

Result of collectivization: More peasants become available to work in the expanding industrial cities.

Alright, enough joking around...here's what's **WRONG** with the Soviet Union ...let's say that you are a peasant who does **NOT** want to voluntarily join a collective farm. Well, you go to prison or a labor camp in Siberia...

How many peasants experienced such a fate? A few **MILLION**...

During collectivization and industrialization, Stalin began to feel like he was losing control of the country.

The 1930s was characterized by the **Great Purges**, which resulted in *millions* of Soviet citizens being executed or deported without a trial.

The **totalitarian politics** of Stalinism are the truly horrible aspect of the Soviet Union. Stalin became a dictator concerned about preserving his own power.

He was a dictator. He had a large army. He was undemocratic and anti-capitalist.