

A. Introduction

So far III. Existentialism has involved the Marxist challenge to the West, with a consideration of Lenin, Imperialism, and, now, Russia. This present topic concerns a traditional power, which has been able to identify herself with the Third World in many ways. Many of the Third World powers, therefore, are specifically treated in these lectures. The course goal for this topic is **to motivate students to evaluate Russian Communism.**

B. Economic Structure

The allied opposition to the Bolsheviks was never unified because of concern with other world problems. An economic decline, which did cause serious trouble, however, did envelop Russia from 1916, to hit bottom in 1921. The decline ended when Lenin introduced the New Economic Policy (NEP) which allowed new freedom to trade and agriculture. Within six years, the economy had revived. The Bolsheviks still had control of industry, banking, and foreign trade without going back to capitalism.

After the turmoil previous to 1921, Stalin consolidated the government and became dictator. From 1924 through 1927 the peasants continued to make heavy contributions to industrialization by growing the food industrial workers required. The rest of Europe was struggling with the 1924 Dawes reparation settlement and the Locarno treaties of 1925. The Locarno agreements guaranteed the postwar boundaries of Western Europe, but failed to provide similar guarantees for Eastern Europe.ⁱ

The Soviet Union was excluded from long-term U. S. and European credit. This meant that Soviet national security lost incentive to continue a 1921-1927 policy of peaceful coexistence and partial economic integration with the West. This also meant that the Soviets lost incentive to turn toward a better economic base, after 1928, through autonomous economic development.ⁱⁱ

By 1927, a larger measure of freedom granted to Soviet traders and farmers revived the over-all economy to the level of 1913-1914. More progress was needed. Periodically, the Soviet government forced the peasants to give up their crops at below market prices. Just as periodically, the peasants resisted. Rather than make useful adjustments to the NEP, the government initiated collectivization.ⁱⁱⁱ

Stalin inaugurated his Five-Year Plan of political and economic dictatorship. The peasants resisted collectivization. Five million people and about half the cattle died during the first Five-Year Plan (1928-1933). 1937 passed the bottleneck of needing more grain for the cities and more machinery for the farms. By 1937, the Second World War Five-Year Plan had doubled production and enabled Russia to fight and survive the Second World War. In purely economic terms, nonetheless, the NEP would have provided a far better foundation for industrialization than collectivization.^{iv}

An added dimension of the ruthlessness of the approach can be seen from what happened to the Russian military in 1937. Stalin arrested 643 of the top 899 officers. He then had military men sit in judgment over their peers until only sixty of those arrested survived. These military men, some of them quite prominent, became accomplices in the purge until they themselves became victims.^v Personal charisma enabled Stalin to get away with this slaughter.

As students may recall, Octavian, better known as Caesar Augustus, the Emperor who took the census at Bethlehem gained power through taxes and the military. Taxes and the military are the jugular veins of the body politic. Stalin was gaining control of the military.

Increase in productivity resulted in lower standards of living in order to gain the surplus wealth necessary for industrialization. Only in 1954-55 was the standard of living level of 1913 reached again. For all of that time, the people were paying for industrialization and wars. In 1975, twenty-seven percent of the Soviet labor force and one-quarter of the Soviet budget was still engaged in agriculture. Farm products accounted for only twenty-five percent of Soviet gross national product (GNP). The Five-Year Plan for 1976-80 called for more than an equivalent

billion French francs for additional farm machinery and chemical fertilizers.^{vi} The mediocre results of that plan were reflected in the relatively modest objectives of the 81-85 plan, which included a slight tilt toward consumer goods. Problems the Soviet Union needed to face in 1980 included an increasing shortage of labor, lagging productivity, and narrow bottlenecks in the entire transportation network.^{vii} The peaceful revolution of Eastern Europe occurred in February 1990.

C. Foreign Affairs

Russia wanted to maintain both security of the country and to inaugurate a world revolt. In 1919, the Third International was formed for those in the world who would follow Communist revolutionary techniques rather than the gradualism of the Second International. The Third International was dissolved in the Second World War, probably in the 1935-39 period, for the sake of peace with the allies. In 1947, the Third International was revived under the title of Community Information Bureau, or Cominform.^{viii} After 1947 rank and file Communists did enjoy a degree of freedom.^{ix}

In 1934, Russia entered the League of Nations, but, like Germany, saw the League as an agent to preserve the victory of the French and English. The West had allowed Russia into the League of Nations because it saw itself attacked by Japanese aggression and by the rise of Hitler determined to expand in Europe. The Communists did not see Hitler as that dangerous. Between 1925 and 1935, Germany and Russia helped develop German military leaders—contrary to terms in the Versailles Peace Treaty. The Russians continued to do this even during the first two years Hitler was in office.

D. Politics

Under the leadership of Lenin and Trotsky (see “Trotsky Sings,” on page 1029 in the fifth edition of Chambers)^x Russian objectives were: (1) peace with the Central Powers; (2) supremacy of the proletariat (urban workers); (3) economic and social reforms; (4) consolidation; (5) world spread of Communism. To implement these objectives, the humiliating Treaty of Brest Litovsk was signed in 1918. See “Map 26.5, World War I,” on page 1085 in the fifth edition of Chambers.^{xi} The Bolsheviks had to end their participation in World War I at practically any cost. About one-quarter of their land was given up.

E. Conclusion

By studying the history of Russia, with special attention to the Introduction; Economic Structure; Foreign Affairs; and Politics, the student has been motivated to evaluate Russian Communism. A real alternative to capitalism was present. At issue was the price of freedom.

Supplement

F. Introduction

There are some ongoing issues which merit treatment. First is a little something on Stalin, left over from the previous main lecture. Another involves coming to terms with the Twentieth Century as the Century of War; the other involves the plethora of nationalities within the Soviet Union.

G. Stalin

After the death of Lenin in 1924, Stalin became the leader of the Communists and the dominant force in the Soviet government. Among the men who also had aspired to succeed Lenin, were Trotsky, first commissar for foreign affairs and Zinoviev, organizer and head of the Third International. Zinoviev joined with Trotsky in criticizing Stalin, because Stalin compromised by cooperating with some capitalist countries. This type of compromising may have had some rewards among U. S. intellectuals, making these intellectuals more willing to portray Stalin as an “Uncle Joe” rather than as the ruthless killer he was.

There is a hidden problem here with an alienated Western intellectual mind-set, which saw greener grass on the other side of the fence. At one time, the Soviet Union, under Uncle Joe

Stalin, held such a focus. More recently, the Third World or China under Mao or Cuba under Castro have served the same sort of scapegoat function. The problem became recognized as these alienated intellectuals tried to justify the purges of the 1930's or that of 1953 or even direct their anger at those who complained of the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. Ethnocentrism was used as a sort of self-flagellation to dismiss left-wing repression.^{xii}

H. Peace^{xiii}

When did World War I really conclude? According to better thinkers, the 1919 Versailles Treaty did not settle the war. To oversimplify but focus the issue, the Dawes Plan did.

Versailles did not settle post-war guilt. Dawes did. Versailles did not settle international rivalry. Dawes did. Before the Dawes Plan, the British stalemated the French attempt to prevent German recovery. After Dawes, the French stalemated the English attempt to reintegrate Germany into the world of nations.

Versailles did not assume that German good will was required for peace. The reparations clauses of Dawes and the later disarmament clauses of Locarno did. Versailles did not balance the domestic and foreign policy needs of Germany and France. Dawes did. The Dawes Plan,^{xiv} Locarno Pact,^{xv} and Washington Conference^{xvi} are all treated on page 902 in the sixth edition of Chambers.

Scholars track World War I along three main lines: responsibility, conflicting interests, and systemic contradictions. The basic question is, did World War I require World War II? The most depressing answer is yes, because the Twentieth Century is the Century of War. The least depressing answer is that the question can still be asked.

While Germany received long term U. S. credit, Russia was denied. In this way, Russia was also having trouble mainstreaming into international affairs. There was a shift occurring about 1928 from international cooperation to a go-it-alone approach. In the final analysis, London and Paris were dominating Europe through manipulations of internal corporatism and transnational capitalism.

I. Nationalities^{xvii}

The Soviet Union is composed of about 300 million people in more than 100 distinct nationalities speaking 120 languages. In March 1990, counting Lithuania as part of the Soviet Union, there were fifteen republics there. One out of six Soviets was a Muslim in 1980. By 2000 the estimate is one in four. In 1987 one in four Red Army recruits came from the Central Asian republics.

According to Lenin "all ethnic groups inhabiting the country [were] equal and sovereign." This power included the right to secede and form an independent state. Jews have not been able to make much of this provision, although as many as 250,000 have been allowed to emigrate over the past twenty-five years. All school children must learn Russian and Russian is the required language for graduate theses and dissertations.

J. Existentialism

A word seems in order to explain how existentialism serves to hold this third section of the course together. Existentialism is generally atheistic. Such atheism reached the academic high ground when it was only the atheists who said, following the exposure of the Holocaust, that no Holocaust should ever happen, to any one, ever again. The best the religious groups could claim was that no Holocaust should ever happen to them either again or ever.

Lenin was an atheist who challenged the tenets of Western civilization as a professed outsider. Imperialism challenged the tenets of Western civilization from the inside by fostering offensive war. Russia again challenged the tenets of Western civilization by denying not only God, but also the right to private property.

Under the Communists, the Russian Orthodox Church suffered persecution. Insofar as Western civilization is concerned, such persecution was nothing new. In 1964 seven thousand Russian

Orthodox churches were still open in the Soviet Union.^{xviii} In the time just before the Soviet Union fell, Dr. Jirran thought that atheism had actually won out in Russia; but when the fall was celebrated with a Solemn High Mass, Dr. Jirran changed his mind.

K. Conclusion

The incompatible inseparables at work in this topic are those between the supremacy of the territorial state as the "natural" unit of human society and the claim of the church to govern human souls. The comments on III. Existentialism show that this claim permeates this Century of War. By studying Introduction, Economic Structure, Foreign Affairs, Politics, and Conclusion in the formal lecture and Introduction, Stalin, Peace, Nationalities, Existentialism, and this Conclusion, the student has been motivated to evaluate Russian Communism. Students are reminded to read, study, think, and prepare a comment.

Footnotes

ⁱNorman Rich, review of Piotr S. Wandycz, The Twilight of French Eastern Alliances, 1926-1936: French-Czechoslovak-Polish Relations from Locarno to the Remilitarization of the Rhineland The American Historical Review, Vol. 95, No. 3 (June 1990), page 813.

ⁱⁱJon Jacobson, "Review Essay: Is There a New International History of the 1920s?" The American Historical Review, 88 (June 1983): 635.

ⁱⁱⁱHerbert J. Ellison, review of Stephan Merl, Der Agrarmarkt und die Neue Okonomische Politik: Die Anfänge staatlicher, Lenkung der Landwirtschaft in der Sowjetunion, 1925-1928 in The American Historical Review, 89 (April 1984): 494.

^{iv}ibid.

^vPeter Kenez, review of Vitaly Rapoport and Yuri Alexeev, High Treason: Essays on the History of the Red Army, 1918-38 in The American Historical Review, ??, (?? before March 1990): 713. Students are invited to obtain the full title for this article. There is a possibility of extra credit for this research chore.

^{vi}Documentation mislaid, May 1, 1987

^{vii}Facts on File, September? 12, 1980, p. 945; Daniel L. Bond and Herbert S. Levine, "World Economic Outlook: II Socialist Nations Have Economic Troubles, too: Soviet Union: A sluggish recovery from last year's failures," Business Week, Vol. , No. (May 5, 1980), pp. 73-73. A good special project would be for a student to improve this documentation and to bring this information up to date.

^{viii}Documentation mislaid, May 1, 1987

^{ix}Comments by Stephen A. Schuker on Charles S. Maier, "AHR Forum: The Two Postwar Eras and the Conditions for Stability in Twentieth-Century Western Europe," The American Historical Review, 86 (April 1981): 346.

^xChambers, 4th ed., page 1020.

^{xi}Page 982 in the fourth edition of Chambers.

^{xii}Paul Hollander, review of William L. O'Neill, A Better World: The Great Schism, Stalinism and the American Intellectuals in The American Historical Review, 88 (December 1983): 1337-1339.

^{xiii}This is based on Jon Jacobson, "Review Essay: Is There a New International History of the 1920s?" The American Historical Review, 88 (June 1983): 620-621, 635, and 640-645.

^{xiv}Page 1020 of the fourth edition of Chambers; 1135 of the fifth.

^{xv}Pages 1030 and 1084 in the fourth edition of Chambers; 1135-1137 of the fifth.

^{xvi}Page 1031 in the fourth edition of Chambers; 1136 in the fifth edition.

^{xvii}Moscow (AP), "Soviet population makeup portends change," Daily Press/The Times-Herald, Saturday, 25 April, 1987, p. B 13.

^{xviii}William C. Fletcher, review of Dimitry V. Pospelovsky, A History of Soviet Atheism in Theory and Practice and the Believer. Volume 1, A History of Marxist-Leninist Atheism and Soviet Antireligious Policies; volume 2, Soviet Antireligious Campaigns and Persecutions; volume 3, Soviet Studies on the Church and the Believer's Response to Atheism, The American Historical Review, Vol. ??, No. 5 (February April June October December 19??), page 874-875.