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The Rise and Fall of Soviet Communism

Analyzing Visual Primary Sources
World History Series

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Introduction

Primary sources are the building blocks of history. Using these sources to introduce students to historical periods offers students the opportunity to become historians themselves—to analyze the evidence, form hypotheses, and learn how to support arguments based on evidence. They learn what it means to interpret the past in ways that provide meaning for the present. Textual primary sources can often be difficult for students to engage with because they are often couched in unfamiliar language from a different historical era. Visual primary sources can prove more appealing and accessible to students, and they also involve different types of “reading” skills.

How to Use This Product

This PowerPoint® presentation is designed to walk students through the process of primary source interpretation. Slides help to focus students’ attention and train them how to “read” visual primary sources. Targeted questions and enlarged insets from images help to train students to see deeper into the historical record, to uncover evidence that, though plainly before their eyes, is not always obvious at first glance.

Let Us Know What You Think

At Social Studies School Service, we always strive to provide the best supplemental curriculum materials at a superior value. If you have feedback that could help us improve this product, requests for other titles in this series, or stories of how it has helped your students, please let us know. You can e-mail us at access@socialstudies.com.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Dr. Aaron Willis
Chief Education Officer
Social Studies School Service



The Rise and Fall of Soviet Communism



Table of Contents



- Marxism/Leninism
- The Russian Revolution
- Totalitarianism and Stalin
- Failure of the Economic System
- The Fall of the Soviet Union

Marxism/Leninism

- Marxism
- Class struggle
- History's "capitalist" phase
- Leninism
- Russia was ready

Marxism and the Soviet Union were archetypically Western experiments, parts of a trend that can be traced back as far as Plato's *Republic* and carried forward by other attempts at creating perfection on earth. The idea of Marxism emerged as a reaction to the harsh realities of early industrial capitalism. Karl Marx, along with his sponsor and collaborator Friedrich Engels, claimed in *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) that their studies had discerned iron laws of scientific rigidity that inarguably *proved* that history was progressing toward a society of economic equality. According to Marxist theory, history had marched through discernible economic stages defined by the ownership of the means of production. Battles over the means of production historically led to class struggles, and Marx claimed that the history of all political struggle was in fact the history of class struggle. At the time of European industrialization, Marx asserted that history had reached the "capitalist" phase of development and that the next state of historic development—socialism—had already begun. Marx believed that socialism would eventually lead to communism: the working class would rise up against the ruling class and establish a system in which the old notions of property and class would no longer exist. Organized religion, which Marx believed the ruling class used to pacify the proletariat (working class), would also come to an end.

Vladimir Lenin was a passionate follower of Karl Marx; however, key differences existed between "pure" Marxism and Lenin's philosophy (known as Leninism), foremost among them Marx's insistence on the necessity of waiting until a country had achieved a mature capitalist system before implementing a communist one. Lenin himself believed that Russia was ready for a communist system. Under Lenin's leadership, the goal of the Russian Revolution became the immediate and total eradication of the old system and the establishment of a new communist system in accordance with Marxist ideals.



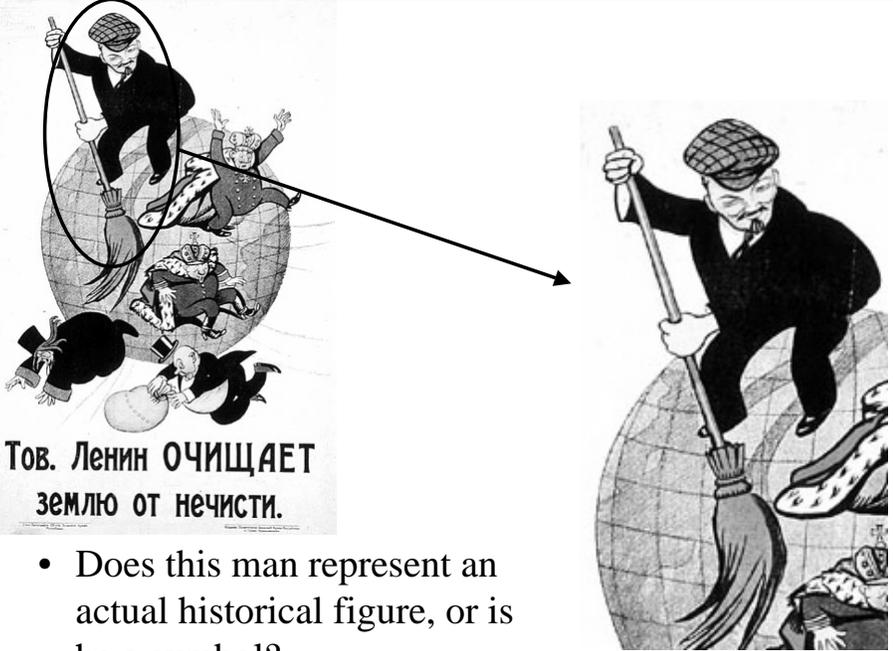
Give students approximately one minute to view this image, then proceed to the following slide.



- What kind of image does this appear to be?
- What country do think this image comes from?
- How can you tell?

This image appears to be a propaganda poster, or possibly a political cartoon.

This image is from Russia. The text is Russian and is written in Cyrillic, a different alphabet than the Latin alphabet used for most European languages and throughout the English-speaking world. Cyrillic was the alphabet of the Russian Empire and the USSR and is still used today.



Тов. Ленин ОЧИЩАЕТ
ЗЕМЛЮ ОТ НЕЧИСТИ.

- Does this man represent an actual historical figure, or is he a symbol?
- How can you tell?

The man appears to be an actual historical figure: Vladimir Lenin, a Russian revolutionary and the first head of the communist government in Russia. We can tell who he is because of his distinctive dress and unique facial features, including the small triangular beard on his chin.