CHAPTER OVERVIEW

CHAPTER LEARNING OBJECTIVES

• To examine the nature of the Russian and Chinese revolutions and how the differences between those revolutions affected the introduction of communist regimes in those countries
• To consider how communist states developed, especially in the USSR and the People’s Republic of China
• To consider the benefits of a communist state
• To consider the harm caused by the two great communist states of the twentieth century
• To introduce students to the cold war and its major issues
• To explore the reasons why communism collapsed in the USSR and China
• To consider how we might assess the communist experience . . . and to inquire if historians should be asking such questions about moral judgment

CHAPTER OUTLINE

I. Opening Vignette
   A. The Berlin Wall was breached on November 9, 1989.
      1. built in 1961 to seal off East Berlin from West Berlin
      2. became a major symbol of communist tyranny
   B. Communism had originally been greeted by many as a promise of liberation.
      1. communist regimes had transformed their societies
      2. provided a major political/ideological threat to the Western world
         a. the cold war (1946–1991)
         b. scramble for influence in the third world between the United States and the USSR
         c. massive nuclear arms race
      3. and then it collapsed

II. Global Communism
   A. Communism had its roots in nineteenth-century socialism, inspired by Karl Marx.
      1. most European socialists came to believe that they could achieve their goals through the democratic process
      2. those who defined themselves as “communists” in the twentieth century advocated revolution
      3. “communism” in Marxist theory is the final stage of historical development, with full development of social equality and collective living
   B. At communism’s height in the 1970s, almost one-third of the world’s population was governed by communist regimes.
      1. the most important communist societies by far were the USSR and China
      2. communism also came to Eastern Europe, North Korea, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Cuba, Afghanistan
3. none of these countries had the industrial capitalism that Marx thought necessary for a socialist revolution
4. communist parties took root in many other areas
C. The various expressions of communism shared common ground
   1. a common ideology, based on Marxism
   2. inspiration of the 1917 Russian Revolution
   3. during the cold war, the Warsaw Pact created a military alliance of Eastern European states and the USSR
      a. Council on Mutual Economic Assistance tied Eastern European economies to the USSR's
      b. Treaty of Friendship between the USSR and China (1950)
4. but relations between communist countries were also marked by rivalry and hostility, sometimes war

III. Comparing Revolutions as a Path to Communism
A. Communist revolutions drew on the mystique of the French Revolution.
   1. got rid of landed aristocracies and the old ruling classes
   2. involved peasant upheavals in the countryside; educated leadership in the cities
   3. French, Russian, and Chinese revolutions all looked to a modernizing future, eschewed any nostalgia for the past
   4. but there were important differences:
      a. communist revolutions were made by highly organized parties guided by a Marxist ideology
      b. the middle classes were among the victims of communist upheavals, whereas middle classes were chief beneficiaries of French Revolution

B. Russia: Revolution in a Single Year
   1. Russia's revolution (1917) was sudden, explosive
      a. Tsar Nicholas II was forced to abdicate the throne in February 1917
      b. massive social upheaval
   2. deep-seated social revolution soon showed the inadequacy of the Provisional Government
      a. it would not/could not meet the demands of the revolutionary masses
      b. refused to withdraw from WWI
      c. left opening for the rise of more radical groups
      d. most effective opposition group was the Bolsheviks, led by Vladimir Ulyanov (Lenin)
   3. Bolsheviks seized power in a coup (October 1917)
      a. claimed to act on behalf of the "soviets"
      b. three-year civil war followed: Bolsheviks vs. a variety of enemies
      c. by 1921, Bolsheviks (now calling their party "communist") had won
   4. during the civil war, the Bolsheviks:
      a. regimented the economy
      b. suppressed nationalist rebellions
      c. committed atrocities (as did their enemies)
      d. integrated many lower-class men into the Red Army and into local governments
      e. claimed to defend Russia from imperialists as well as from internal exploiters
      f. strengthened their tendency toward authoritarianism
   5. for 25 years, the new USSR was the only communist country
a. expansion into Eastern Europe thanks to Soviet occupation at the end of WWII
b. Stalin sought a buffer of “friendly” governments in Eastern Europe; imposed communism from outside

C. China: A Prolonged Revolutionary Struggle
1. communism won in China in 1949, after a long struggle
   a. the Chinese imperial system had collapsed in 1911
   b. the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was not founded until 1921
2. over the next 28 years, the CCP grew immensely and transformed its strategy under Mao Zedong
3. had a formidable enemy in the Guomindang (Nationalist Party), which ruled China after 1928
   a. Chiang Kai-shek led the Guomindang
   b. the Guomindang promoted modern development, at least in cities
   c. the countryside remained impoverished
4. the CCP was driven from the cities, developed a new strategy
   a. looked to the peasants for support, not city workers
   b. only gradually won respect and support of peasants
   c. given a boost by Japan’s invasion of China
5. the CCP addressed both foreign imperialism and peasant exploitation
   a. expressed Chinese nationalism and demand for social change
   b. gained a reputation for honesty, unlike the Guomindang

IV. Building Socialism in Two Countries
A. Joseph Stalin built a socialist society in the USSR in the 1920s and 1930s; Mao Zedong did the same in China in the 1950s and 1960s.
1. first step: modernization and industrialization
2. serious attack on class and gender inequalities
3. both created political systems dominated by the Communist Party
   a. high-ranking party members were expected to exemplify socialism
   b. all other parties were forbidden
   c. the state controlled almost the entire economy
4. China’s conversion to communism was a much easier process than that experienced by the USSR
   a. the USSR had already paved the way
   b. Chinese communists won the support of the rural masses
   c. but China had more economic problems to resolve
B. Communist Feminism
1. communist countries pioneered “women’s liberation”
   a. largely directed by the state
   b. the USSR almost immediately declared full legal and political equality for women
   c. divorce, abortion, pregnancy leave, women’s work were all enabled or encouraged
2. 1919: USSR’s Communist Party set up Zhenotdel (Women’s Department)
   a. pushed a feminist agenda
   b. male communist officials and ordinary people often opposed it
   c. Stalin abolished it in 1930
3. communist China also worked for women’s equality
   a. Marriage Law of 1950 ordered free choice in marriage, easier divorce, the end of concubinage and child marriage, and equal property rights for
women
b. the CCP tried to implement pro-female changes against strong opposition
c. women became much more active in the workforce
4. limitations on communist women’s liberation
   a. Stalin declared the women’s question “solved” in 1930
   b. no direct attack in either state on male domination within the family
   c. women retained burden of housework and child care as well as paid employment
d. few women made it into top political leadership

C. Socialism in the Countryside
1. in both states, the communists took landed estates and redistributed the land to peasants
   a. Russia: peasants took and redistributed the land themselves
   b. China: land reform teams mobilized poor peasants to confront landlords and wealthier peasants
2. second stage of rural reform: effort to end private property in land by collectivizing agriculture
   a. in China, collectivization was largely peaceful (1950s)
   b. in the USSR, collectivization was imposed by violence (1928–1933)
   c. China’s collectivization went further than the USSR’s

D. Communism and Industrial Development
1. both states regarded industrialization as fundamental
   a. need to end humiliating backwardness and poverty
   b. desire to create military strength to survive in a hostile world
2. China largely followed the model established by the USSR
   a. state ownership of property
   b. centralized planning (five-year plans)
   c. priority given to heavy industry
   d. massive mobilization of resources
   e. intrusive party control of the whole process
   f. both countries experienced major economic growth
3. the USSR leadership largely accepted the social outcomes of industrialization
4. China under Mao Zedong tried to combat the social effects of industrialization
   a. the Great Leap Forward (1958–1960) promoted small-scale industrialization in rural areas
   b. the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (mid-1960s)

E. The Search for Enemies
1. the USSR and China under Stalin and Mao were rife with paranoia
   a. fear that important communists were corrupted by bourgeois ideas; became class enemies
   b. fear of a vast conspiracy by class enemies and foreign imperialists to restore capitalism
2. USSR: the Terror (Great Purges) of the late 1930s
   a. enveloped millions of Russians, including tens of thousands of prominent communists
   b. many were sentenced to harsh labor camps (the gulag)
c. nearly a million people were executed between 1936 and 1941
3. China: the search for enemies was a more public process
a. the Cultural Revolution (1966–1969) escaped control of communist leadership
b. Mao had called for rebellion against the Communist Party itself
c. purge of millions of supposed capitalist sympathizers
d. Mao had to call in the army to avert civil war
4. both the Terror and the Cultural Revolution discredited socialism and contributed to eventual collapse of communist experiment

V. East versus West: A Global Divide and a Cold War
A. Military Conflict and the Cold War
1. Europe was the cold war’s first arena
   a. Soviet concern for security and control in Eastern Europe
   b. American and British desire for open societies linked to the capitalist world economy
2. creation of rival military alliances (NATO and the Warsaw Pact)
   a. American sphere of influence (Western Europe) was largely voluntary
   b. Soviet sphere (Eastern Europe) was imposed
   c. the “Iron Curtain” divided the two spheres
3. communism spread into Asia (China, Korea, Vietnam), caused conflict
   a. North Korea invaded South Korea in 1950
   b. Vietnam: massive U.S. intervention in the 1960s
4. major cold war–era conflict in Afghanistan
   a. a Marxist party took power in 1978 but soon alienated much of the population
   b. Soviet military intervention (1979–1989) met with little success
   c. USSR withdrew in 1989 under international pressure; communist rule of Afghanistan collapsed
5. the battle that never happened: Cuba
   a. Fidel Castro came to power in 1959
   b. nationalization of U.S. assets provoked U.S. hostility
   c. Castro gradually aligned himself with the USSR
   d. Cuban missile crisis (October 1962)
B. Nuclear Standoff and Third World Rivalry
1. the USSR succeeded in creating a nuclear weapon in 1949
2. massive arms race: by 1989, the world had nearly 60,000 nuclear warheads, with complex delivery systems
3. 1949–1989: fear of massive nuclear destruction and even the possible extinction of humankind
4. both sides knew how serious their destructive power was
   a. careful avoidance of nuclear provocation, especially after 1962
   b. avoidance of any direct military confrontation, since it might turn into a nuclear war
5. both the United States and the USSR courted third world countries
   a. United States intervened in Iran, the Philippines, Guatemala, El Salvador, Chile, the Congo, and elsewhere because of fear of communist penetration
   b. the United States often supported corrupt, authoritarian regimes
   c. many third world countries resisted being used as pawns
   d. some countries (e.g., India) claimed “nonalignment” status in the cold war
   e. some tried to play off the superpowers against each other
C. The United States: Superpower of the West, 1945–1975
1. the United States became leader of the West against communism
   a. led to the creation of an “imperial” presidency in the United States
   b. power was given to defense and intelligence agencies, creating a “national security state”
   c. fear that democracy was being undermined
   d. anticommunist witch-hunts (1950s) narrowed the range of political debate
   e. strengthened the influence of the “military-industrial complex”

2. U.S. military effort was sustained by a flourishing economy and an increasingly middle-class society
   a. U.S. industry hadn’t been harmed by World War II, unlike every other major industrial society
   b. Americans were a “people of plenty”
   c. growing pace of U.S. investment abroad

3. American popular culture also spread around the world
   a. jazz, rock-and-roll, and rap found foreign audiences
   b. by the 1990s, American movies took about 70 percent of the European market
   c. around 20,000 McDonald’s restaurants in 100 countries

D. The Communist World, 1950s–1970s
1. Nikita Khrushchev took power in the USSR in 1953; in 1956, he denounced Stalin as a criminal
2. the cold war justified a continuing Soviet emphasis on military and defense industries
3. growing conflict among the communist countries
   a. Yugoslavia rejected Soviet domination
   b. Soviet invasions of Hungary (1956–1957) and Czechoslovakia (1968) to crush reform movements
   c. early 1980s: Poland was also threatened with invasion
   d. brutal suppression of reform tarnished the image of Soviet communism, gave credence to Western views of the cold war as a struggle between tyranny and freedom
   e. sharp opposition between the USSR and China
   f. China went to war against a communist Vietnam in 1979
4. world communism reached its greatest extent in the 1970s

VI. Comparing Paths to the End of Communism
A. The communist era ended rapidly and peacefully between the late 1970s and 1991.
2. Europe: popular movements overthrew communist governments in 1989
3. both cases show the economic failure of communism
   a. communist states couldn’t catch up economically
   b. the Soviet economy was stagnant
   c. failures were known around the world
   d. economic failure limited military capacity
4. both cases show the moral failure of communism
   a. Stalin’s Terror and the gulag
   b. Mao’s Cultural Revolution
   c. near-genocide in Cambodia
   d. all happened in a global climate that embraced democracy and human rights
B. China: Abandoning Communism and Maintaining the Party
   1. Deng Xiaoping came to power in 1976
      a. relaxed censorship
      b. released some 100,000 political prisoners
      c. dismantled collectivized farming system
   2. China opened itself to the world economy
      a. result: stunning economic growth and new prosperity
      b. also generated massive corruption among officials, urban inequality,
         pollution, and inequality between coast and interior
   3. the Chinese Communist Party has kept its political monopoly
      a. brutal crushing of democracy movement in late 1980s
      b. Tiananmen Square massacre
   4. China is now a “strange and troubled hybrid” that combines nationalism,
      consumerism, and new respect for ancient traditions
C. The Soviet Union: The Collapse of Communism and Country
   1. Mikhail Gorbachev became general secretary in mid-1980s
      a. launched economic reform program (perestroika, or “restructuring”) in
         1987
      b. was met with heavy resistance
      c. Gorbachev responded with glasnost (“openness”) to greater cultural and
         intellectual freedoms
   2. glasnost revealed what a mess the USSR was (crime, prostitution, suicide,
      corruption, etc.)
      a. the extent of Stalin’s atrocities was uncovered
      b. new openness to religious expression
      c. ending of government censorship of culture
   3. democratization—free elections in 1989
   4. move to end the cold war by making unilateral military cuts, negotiating arms
      control with United States
   5. but Gorbachev’s reforms led to collapse of the USSR
      a. the planned economy was dismantled before a market-based system
         could develop
      b. new freedoms led to more strident demands
      c. subordinate states demanded greater autonomy or independence
      d. Gorbachev refused to use force to crush the protesters
   6. Eastern European states broke free from USSR-sponsored communism
   7. conservatives attempted a coup (August 1991)
   8. fifteen new and independent states emerged from the breakup of the USSR
D. By 2000, the communist world had shrunk considerably.
   1. communism had lost its dominance completely in the USSR and Eastern
      Europe
   2. China had mostly abandoned communist economic policies
   3. Vietnam and Laos remained officially communist but pursued Chinese-style
      reforms
   4. Cuba: economic crisis in the 1990s, began to allow small businesses and
      private food markets
   5. North Korea is the most unreformed and Stalinist communist state left
   6. international tensions remain only in East Asia and the Caribbean
VII. Reflections: To Judge or Not to Judge: The Ambiguous Legacy of Communism
   A. Many think that scholars shouldn’t make moral judgments.
1. but we can’t help being affected by our own time and culture
2. it’s more valuable to acknowledge the limits of cultural conditioning than to pretend to a dream of objectivity
3. judgments are a way of connecting with the past
B. Many continue to debate whether the Russian and Chinese revolutions were beneficial and whether the late twentieth-century reforms were good or bad.
1. communism brought hope to millions
2. communism killed and imprisoned millions
C. Is it possible to acknowledge such ambiguity?