The Russian Revolution

In the mid-1800’s, there was a philosopher named Karl Marx. At that time, Marx looked at the major nations of the world. He said their economies were based on capitalism; individuals invested capital, money, so they could make a profit.

The trouble with capitalism, Marx said, is that some people become rich through the expense and hard work of others. Marx thought that there should be a fairer way or system to distribute the wealth of a country, so all the people could share in the profits. According to Marx, everyone should share equally.

Marx believed that eventually the rich in a country, the bourgeois, would be overthrown by the poor, the proletariat. Marx predicted that all capitalistic countries would be overthrown by their workers, who would rebel against the rich.

The writings of Marx impressed another economic philosopher and politician; his name was Lenin, and he lived in Russia. Lenin adopted the writings of Marx and added some ideas of his worn. Lenin believed in socialism and felt that the government should own and manage the production and distribution of goods for the benefit of society.

However, Russia had been ruled for centuries by the czars. In the fall of 1015, when Russia was involved in WWI, fighting the Germans, Czar Nicholas took command of armies in the field. This left a power opening, and the government collapsed. Food riots, strikes, and war protests turned into mass demonstrations forcing Czar Nicholas to abdicate. In the following power struggle, Lenin organized the workers and peasants of Russia. With the help of Trotsky, his general, the government of Russia was overthrown. Czar Nicholas and his family were murdered to insure they would not be rescued and placed back in power. Trotsky led fighting and was recognized as a national hero. Lenin came to power and worked to establish Russia as the United Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR). Lenin confirmed the rights of the peasants to own land; he reduced taxes, and permitted a certain amount of private enterprise. However, in politics he was rigid, permitting no opinions other than those of the Communist party.

After Lenin’s death two of his followers struggled for control of Russia: Trotsky and Stalin fought for political power and control. Stalin won. He labeled Trotsky a traitor and forced him to leave the country. Trotsky escaped to Mexico but was assassinated there.

Under the leadership of Stalin, the Soviet Union became a totalitarian state. The state had total control over the lives of its people. He ordered the collectivization of farms. When people resisted, he ordered the state to seize their land and possessions. He showed no mercy to rebellious owners. In 1932-33, he created a famine in the Ukraine and removed 3 million people through death by starvation. In 1936, he conducted a series of purges. He had many Red Army officers and old Bolsheviks executed, many of which were men that had helped him get into power. In 1939, he signed a non aggression pact with Nazi Germany. When Germany invaded Poland, starting WWII, the pact permitted the Soviets to take eastern Poland, and other land without German opposition. In 1941 when Germany invaded the Soviet Union, Stalin took command of the army parading himself as a savior. In 1943 and 1945 he issued inflexible terms to England and the United States, his allies. He made a pact about the reconstruction of defeated Germany and then broke his work. After the war, he was determined to make the USSR dominate in Europe and to impose Communism on the world. Through purges and other brutal methods, he forced Communist governments on Eastern Europe. His blockade of Berlin in 1948-49 threatened a third world war.

Stalin died in 1953. Nikita Khrushchev took over in 1956, and the destruction of Stalin’s image began. By 1961, his body had been removed from Red Square and his name removed from public buildings, streets, and factories. The sty of Stalingrad was renamed Volgograd.