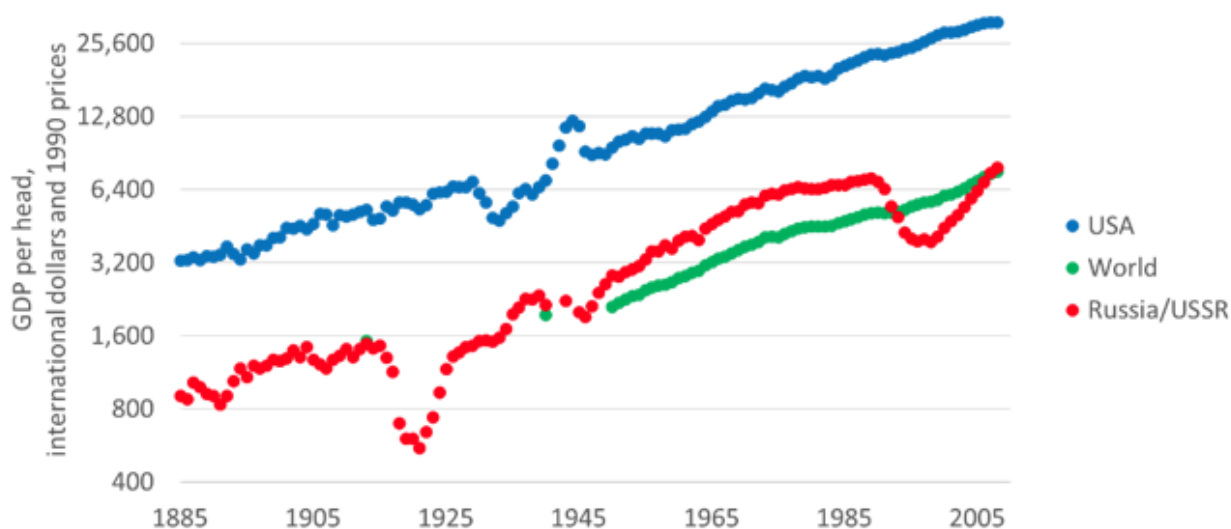


Was the economy in the Soviet Union beneficial for its citizens?

Read through the documents and answer the guiding questions. After this, answer the questions on the bottom of the document and answer the compelling question.

Document A: Russian GDP from 1885 to 2005



Soviet economic institutions were formed in the period from 1917 to around 1934 (Davies 1994).

These years were marked by intense political and social conflict and several U-turns that varied the scope for market organisation and consumer choice. The U-turns give some credence to the idea that the Soviet economy could have developed along more than one alternative path. Even today, after all, ‘varieties of communism’ persist – from China and Cuba to North Korea.

Despite the variation, there were important continuities in Soviet policies after 1917. Most obvious was centralised single-party dictatorship. The dictators shared beliefs that formed their perceived self-interest and how best to promote it. They saw the world as intrinsically hostile, and their country as a fortress besieged by enemies and penetrated by spies. When not at war, they prepared for war.

In the economy, they built the capacity of an authoritarian state to select and direct personnel, to protect its supply chains and to channel and filter information. This was a unilinear process that began in 1917 and continued in the background, regardless of policy fluctuations (Harrison 2017b).

**This lesson plan was built by Social Studies Education students and faculty at Plymouth State University.*

*The Soviet economy, 1917-1991: Its life and afterlife | CEPR. Accessed October 21, 2024.
<https://cepr.org/voxeu/columns/soviet-economy-1917-1991-its-life-and-afterlife>.*

Guiding Questions:

1. According to the graph, what happened to the economy during 1917?
2. Explain why this might be happening during this time.

Document B: Communist Party of the Soviet Union

From 1918 through the 1980s the Communist Party of the Soviet Union was a monolithic, monopolistic ruling party that dominated the political, economic, social, and cultural life of the U.S.S.R. The constitution and other legal documents that supposedly ordered and regulated the government of the Soviet Union were in fact subordinate to the policies of the CPSU and its leadership. Constitutionally, the Soviet government and the CPSU were separate bodies, but virtually all high government officials were party members, and it was this system of interlocking dual membership in party and governmental bodies that enabled the CPSU to both make policy and see that it was enforced by the government.

But by 1990, Mikhail Gorbachev's efforts to restructure the Soviet Union's economy and democratize its political system had eroded both the CPSU's unity and its monopolistic hold on power. In 1990 the CPSU voted to surrender its constitutionally guaranteed monopoly of power, thereby permitting opposition parties to flourish legally in the Soviet Union. The holding of free (and in some cases multiparty) elections in various union republics hastened the decline in the party's membership and enabled defectors from its ranks (such as Boris Yeltsin) to rise to positions of power in republic governments.

*"Communist Party of the Soviet Union." Encyclopædia Britannica, September 23, 2024.
<https://britannica.com/topic/Communist-Party-of-the-Soviet-Union>.*

Guiding Questions:

1. What gave the Soviet Government so much power?
2. In what ways was the communist party unopposed?

Document C: Fear and Loathing in the USSR: what life was like during the so-called golden age of Soviet stability

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During the Cold War, the Soviet Union based its entire existence on “outrunning and outdoing” Western countries, most notably the United States. Most of the time, such “outperforming” was showcased by complete absurdities, such as melting more cast iron than the United States, regardless of the actual need or efficiency of time spent on such an effort. Another example is the Space Race, which transformed scientific research into a technological confrontation between two countries.

However, it was in the area of living conditions for its own citizens that the Soviet regime constantly backslid. There is a wealth of reasons for this situation, but the main one is that the military-industrial complex received the lion’s share of the revenue generated by the sale of energy carriers to support the dictatorships and partisan movements in “third world” countries. The USSR’s social sphere came as an afterthought. As a result, the daily lives of the Soviet people and their needs such as housing, food, clothing, medical services, educational services, entertainment, etc. were put aside for constant Third World War preparations and attempts to dominate the global stage.

Kateryna, Minkina. “Fear and loathing in the USSR: What Life Was like during the so-Called Golden Age of Soviet Stability • Ukraïner.” Ukraïner, June 3, 2024. <https://www.ukraïner.net/ussr-life/>.

Guiding Questions:

1. How were living standards unfulfilled in the Soviet Union?
2. What other focuses did the Soviet Union have over quality of life for its citizens?

Document D: What It Was Like Growing Up in the Soviet Union

I was nine when we moved to a cooperative apartment building in the Ahmadli district of Baku. This was a mechanism through which people who could not afford to buy housing could contribute their money on a regular basis to a cooperative construction project. You would register and wait, sometimes for years, but even this was not affordable for many. There was a fixed number of square meters per person that each family could get. Still, the flat we got was much larger than what we had gotten used to, though the downside was that we were now very far from the city center. Essentially, it was more like living in a large village.

*Badger, Rational. "What It Was like Growing up in the Soviet Union." Medium, July 15, 2023.
<https://medium.com/@RationalBadger/what-it-was-like-growing-up-in-the-soviet-union-9cbc924dce62>.*

Guiding Questions:

1. Where would you go if you could not afford housing in the Soviet Union?
2. If there are large scale apartment buildings for people who could not afford housing, what might this say about the economy?

Questions for Analysis

1. Based on the documents, what was life like for the average person in the Soviet Union?
2. What was the economy like in the Soviet Union?

Overall, ***was the economy in the Soviet Union beneficial for its citizens?***