

Homework: Fall of the Soviet Union Bias Assignment

Document 1

Primary Source: Adrian Karatnycky

Personal Account of the Fall of the Berlin Wall: The 11th and 12th of November, 1989

In December 1991, the Soviet Union ceased to exist as a nation. The author of this article is a representative of AFL-CIO (a federation of American labor unions). He traveled to the area in 1991 to study the reasons for the breakup of the Soviet Union. In addition to the August coup, he found other causes of the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Other crucial factors contributed, including the courage of the tens of thousands who took to the streets of Moscow, St. Petersburg, and Kiev. A private detective agency provided security to the defenders of the Russian parliament. Managers of nearby hotels fed the heroic resisters. Farther away, strike committees and emerging free trade unions led resistance among coal miners in Russia and Ukraine, and pro-Yeltsin industrial workers in the Urals (a mountain range Russia)...

The events of August 19-21 destroyed the cohesion of the three pillars of the Soviet state—the Communist party, the KGB (the secret police), and the military. With the party now banned, its offices shut down and its bank accounts frozen, the news media in Russia and Ukraine are daily revealing sensational details of illegal and wasteful Communist financial doing. The KGB, which formerly had a force of 488,000 workers, has been broken up along republic lines, the military, which too is fragmenting, is in no mood to intervene to preserve the old order.

The coup created a political vacuum that enabled, indeed encouraged, Boris Yeltsin and other republic leader to press for independence.

Feelings towards the fall of communism and possible bias:

Document 2

Primary Source: Andreas Ramos a Dane witness to the fall of the Berlin Wall

Everything was out of control. Police on horses watched. There was nothing they could do. The crowd had swollen. People were blowing long alpine horns which made a huge noise. There were fireworks, kites, flags and flags, dogs, children. The wall was finally breaking. The cranes lifted slabs aside. East and West German police had traded caps. To get a better view, hundreds of people were climbing onto a shop on the West German side. We scampered up a nine foot wall. People helped each other; some lifted, others pulled. All along the building, people poured up the wall. At the Berlin wall itself, which is 3 meters high, people had climbed up and were sitting astride. The final slab was moved away. A stream of East Germans began to pour thorough....

Looking around, I saw an indescribable joy in the people's faces. It was the end of the government telling people what not to do, it was the end of the Wall, the war, the East, the West. If East Germans were going west, then we should go east, so we poured into East Berlin. Around me, people spoke German, French, Polish, Russian, every language. A woman handed her camera to someone who was standing atop rubble so that he could take her picture. I passed a group of American reporters; they didn't speak anything and couldn't understand what was going on, pushing their microphones in people's faces, and asking "Do you speak English?" Near me, a knot of people cheered as the mayors of East Berlin and West Berlin met and shook hands. I stood with several East German guards, their rifles slung over their shoulders. I asked them if they had bullets in those things. They grinned and said no..... On top of every building were thousands of people. Berlin was out of control. There was no more government, neither in East nor in West. The police and the army were helpless. The soldiers themselves were overwhelmed by the event. They were part of the crowd. Their uniforms meant nothing. The Wall was down.

Feelings towards the fall of communism and possible bias:

Document 3

Source: Andor Heller, *"The Hungarian Revolution," 1956.*

The walls of Budapest are plastered with leaflets put up by the students during the night. They list the fourteen demands adopted at the storm meetings held at the universities:

1. Withdrawal of all Soviet troops from Hungary
2. Complete economic and political equality with the Soviet Union, with no interference in Hungary's internal affairs...
8. A secret general multi-party election
9. The organization of Hungary's economy on the basis of her actual resources
10. Revision of the workers' output quotas and recognition of the right to strike
11. Revisions of the system of compulsory agricultural quotas
12. Equal rights for individual farms and cooperative members...

Someone grabs a Hungarian flag and cuts out the hated hammer and sickle that the communists had placed at its center. One after another of the purified Hungarian flags appear. Suddenly someone remembers to put the old Kossuth (the leader of the Hungarian uprising of 1848-1849) coat-of-arms on the flag... We have created a new flag of freedom!

Feelings towards the fall of communism and possible bias:

Document 4

Source: Milovan Djilas (*Yugoslavia*), *The New Class 1957.*

In contrast to earlier revolutions, the Communist revolution, conducted in the name of doing away with classes, has resulted in the most complete authority of any single new class. Everything else is shame and illusion... this new class, the bureaucracy... may be said to be made up of those who have special privileges and economic preference because of the administrative monopoly they hold... The Communist Party is the backbone of the entire political, economic and ideological activity.... The exclusive, if unwritten, law that only party members can become policeman, officers, diplomats, and only they can exercise actual authority, creates a special privileged group of bureaucrats... The so-called "dictatorship of the proletariat" which is the beginning of and under the best circumstances becomes the authority of the party, inevitably evolves into the dictatorship of the leaders.

Feelings towards the fall of communism and possible bias:

Document 5

Source: *"Twenty-one Demands: A Call for Workers' Rights and Freedom in a Socialist State," issued by Solidarity in Poland 1980.*

1. Acceptance of Free Trade Unions independent of both the Party and employers, in accordance with the International Labor Organization's Convention number 87 on the freedom to form unions, which was ratified by the Polish government.
2. A guarantee of the right to strike and guarantees of security for strikers and their supporters.
4. (a) Reinstatement to their former positions for: people fired for defending workers' rights, in particular those participating in the strikes of 1970 and 1976; students dismissed from school for their convictions. (b) The release of all political prisoners.... (c) A halt to repression for one's convictions....
11. The rationing of meat and meat products through food coupons (until the market is stabilized).
12. Abolition of "commercial prices" and hard currency sales in so-called "internal export" shops.
13. A system of merit selection for management positions on the basis of qualifications rather than Party membership....
19. Reduce the waiting time for apartments.

Feelings towards the fall of communism and possible bias:

Document 6

Source: Vaclav Havel (president of Czechoslovakia), "The Failure of Communism," New Year's Day address, 1990

Our country is not flourishing. The great creative and spiritual potential of our nation is not being applied meaningfully. Entire branches of industry are producing things for which there is no demand while we are short of things we need.

The state, which calls itself a state of workers, is humiliating and exploiting them instead. Our outmoded economy wastes energy, which we have in short supply. The country, which could once be proud of the education of its people, is spending so little on education that today, in that respect, we rank 72nd in the world. We have spoiled our land, rivers, and forests, inherited from our ancestors, and have, today the worst environment in the whole of Europe. Adults die here earlier than in the majority of European countries....

Feelings towards the fall of communism and possible bias:

Document 7

Source: Slavenka Drakulic (a Croatian columnist), "A letter from the United States: The Critical Theory Approach," From How We Survived Communism and Even Laughed, 1991.

Every mother in Bulgaria can point to where communism failed, from the failure of the planned economy (and the consequent lack of food and milk), to the lack of apartments, child-care facilities, clothes, disposable diapers, or toilet paper. The banality of everyday life is where it has really failed, rather than on the level of ideology.

Feelings towards the fall of communism and possible bias: