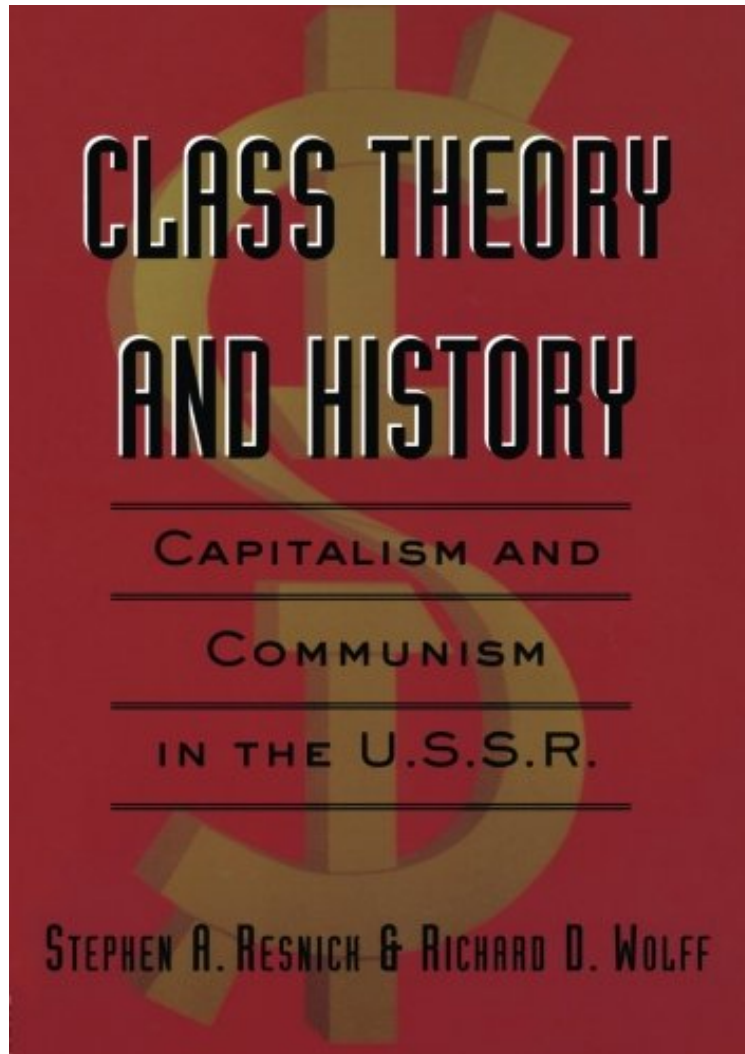


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# Class Theory and History: Capitalism and Communism in the USSR

*Stephen A. Resnick, Richard D. Wolff*  
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Cooper Resnick and Wolff have used Marx's class theory of surplus value as a lens through which to evaluate the USSR from the 1917 Bolshevik revolution through its collapse and dissolution around 1990. This theory says that capitalism, like slavery and feudalism before it, is an exploitive system because the people who do the actual work that generates profit are not the ones who appropriate and distribute that same profit. Communism, the theory continues, is a system where the people who do the work are the same people who appropriate and distribute the profits from that work. Using this theory and its class implications, the authors conclude that aside from some agricultural collectives begun in the '30s, communism was never really installed in the USSR. Instead, a form of state capitalism was achieved that never really conceived its goal as communistic in Marx's sense. Instead, the ideal was state-controlled distribution as opposed to market-based, and abolition of private property. While lip-service was paid to acting in the worker's best interests, the system never actually gave individual workers any say over the disposition of the fruits of their labor. As such, what successive generations (in the USSR and the West as well) were taught was a communistic society, was actually an exploitive system where the state (as opposed to private enterprise in the West) appropriated and distributed the profits. The conclusions painstakingly developed in this book reinforce the intuitive feeling one gets studying the Cold War or observing the two-party system in modern US politics: that the main ideological differences between the two sides are a sham and distraction from Marx's more fundamental dichotomy. The opposition between exploitive and non-exploitive systems.

25 of 26 people found the following review helpful. Paradigm-altering

By Asatar Bair "Class Theory and History" is an amazing study of the Soviet Union that goes well beyond the study of one society's experience. The book is about the class structure of the Soviet Union, but the way the analysis is conducted makes it clear that the questions Resnick and Wolff raise about class theory are applicable to all societies, and their particular answers in the Soviet case yield fascinating insights that have not been understood this clearly before. Wolff and Resnick have written at length about economic theory and methodology, and this work shows their use of class theory and overdetermination. The nuance and sophistication of their analysis is remarkable; their prose touches on the ideals and tragedies of the Soviet experience, the promise and the betrayal of that promise. At the same time, they write with urgency about the successes of the Soviet Union, particularly in the one area that most economists have argued was their greatest failure: agriculture. This book is highly recommended for all students of economic history, the Soviet Union, and class theory.

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"A very ambitious and interesting book on a very important topic.." -Howard Sherman, author of "Reinventing Marxism" "Using a version of Marx's theory of class to explain the rise and fall of the Soviet Union, and the Soviet Union as evidence for the validity of this theory, Resnick and Wolff succeed in providing us with an original and fascinating account of both. Whether one agrees or disagrees with their results, no future work on either of these important subjects will be able to ignore the sheer creative verve and intellectual rigor with which they lay out their arguments. Very highly recommended.." -Bertell Ollman, editor of "Market Socialism: The Debate Among Socialists" "A stunning achievement! Resnick and Wolff have extended their path breaking work in Knowledge and Class to a full-fledged class analysis of the rise and fall of the Soviet Union. Building on the clearest analysis of class in the Marxian tradition, Resnick and Wolff provide a comprehensive analysis of the core contradictions in pre-Soviet Russia and the Soviet Union. This is a work that all those concerned with the Soviet experience, the nature of class, and the possibilities of fundamental social change will have to contend with.." -Victor D. Lippit, editor of "Radical Political Economy: Explorations in Alternative Economic Analysis" "Class Theory and History both follows in the best Marxian tradition's footsteps and develops new important insights. Building upon a notion of class whose pivot is the production and distribution of surplus, the authors offer a stimulating and original interpretation of the USSR's birth, development, and fall. This is class analysis at its best, a work which deserves the widest circulation.." -Guglielmo Carchedi author of "For Another Europe: A Class Analysis of European Economic Integration" "Stephen Resnick and Richard Wolff, both economics professors, approach Soviet history on a highly theoretical level, analyzing the productive relations in Soviet society with sometimes mathematical (or, perhaps, pseudomathematical) precision....[A] strikingly original argument." - "Humanities and Social Sciences Online"