Equality and Dissent

How Soviet criticism reshaped Western Marxist thought

TOT.C.9.6 "Examine how Marxism evolved after the West's intellectual disillusionment with Soviet Communism and evaluate the role of Soviet dissidents, such as Boris Pasternak, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, and Vladimir Bukovsky."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline one piece of evidence about each Soviet dissident. Circle two ways Western thinkers changed their approach to Marxism after questioning Soviet rule.

When the Soviet Model Lost Its Hold

1 In 1956, Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev denounced Stalin's abuses in a secret speech that soon reached the West. That year, Soviet troops crushed an uprising in Hungary. For many Western intellectuals who had viewed the Soviet Union as a model of equality, these events raised a hard question: Could a state claim to free workers while silencing its own people? Some broke with Marxism altogether. Others kept Marx's criticism of capitalist inequality but rejected the idea that Moscow spoke for every socialist. They began to ask how social change could protect political freedom.

2 Writers inside the Soviet Union gave Western readers more reasons to question its leaders. Boris Pasternak's novel *Doctor Zhivago* portrayed lives disrupted by revolution and repression. Barred from publication at home, it appeared in Italy in 1957. After Pasternak won the 1958 Nobel Prize in Literature, Soviet authorities pressured him to refuse it. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn documented forced-labor camps in *The Gulag Archipelago*, first published abroad in 1973. His account challenged the claim that Soviet repression was only a past mistake under Stalin. These authors did not offer one shared political program, but their work challenged Soviet claims to speak for ordinary people.

3 Vladimir Bukovsky exposed the Soviet use of psychiatric hospitals against political dissenters. After years of imprisonment, he was exchanged for a Chilean communist prisoner in 1976. His testimony gave Western critics concrete evidence that repression continued beyond Stalin's rule. Some Marxists in Western Europe pursued democratic paths to socialism, including multiparty elections and civil liberties, rather than taking orders from Moscow. Others in the New Left emphasized grassroots action and criticized both Soviet authoritarianism and Western capitalism. These shifts did not make every dissident a Marxist or every Marxist a defender of Soviet rule. They separated debates about economic equality from support for a repressive state.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did the events of 1956 change some Western intellectuals' views of Soviet Communism and Marxism?

2. How did Pasternak's experience challenge the Soviet state's claim to speak for ordinary people?

3. How did Solzhenitsyn's and Bukovsky's work together challenge the idea that Soviet repression ended with Stalin?

4. Compare two paths Western Marxists took after questioning Moscow's authority. What did both paths reject?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine you edit a Western socialist magazine in the late 1970s. Write a 90 to 110 word editorial arguing whether a movement for economic equality should distance itself from the Soviet state. Use evidence from two different dissidents in the passage and explain one change the movement should make.

ANSWER KEY

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PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline one piece of evidence about each Soviet dissident. Circle two ways Western thinkers changed their approach to Marxism after questioning Soviet rule. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did the events of 1956 change some Western intellectuals' views of Soviet Communism and Marxism?	**Khrushchev's speech and the crushing of the Hungarian uprising raised doubts about the Soviet Union as a model of freedom. Some intellectuals abandoned Marxism, while others kept its criticism of inequality but rejected Moscow's authority.**
2	How did Pasternak's experience challenge the Soviet state's claim to speak for ordinary people?	**His novel portrayed lives harmed by revolution and repression, and Soviet authorities barred its publication at home and pressured him to refuse the Nobel Prize.**
3	How did Solzhenitsyn's and Bukovsky's work together challenge the idea that Soviet repression ended with Stalin?	**Solzhenitsyn documented forced-labor camps, while Bukovsky exposed the use of psychiatric hospitals against dissenters. Together, their work showed that repression was not limited to Stalin's rule.**
4	Compare two paths Western Marxists took after questioning Moscow's authority. What did both paths reject?	**Some pursued socialism through multiparty elections and civil liberties. Others in the New Left emphasized grassroots action. Both rejected Soviet authoritarianism and the idea that Moscow should direct them.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Our magazine should support economic equality without defending the Soviet government. Pasternak's novel was barred at home, and officials pressured him to refuse his Nobel Prize. Bukovsky revealed that officials confined political dissenters in psychiatric hospitals. Neither censorship nor forced confinement protects ordinary people. A socialist movement that tolerates those abuses betrays its own demand for dignity. We should advocate multiparty elections and civil liberties while continuing to challenge economic inequality. That path would allow people to organize for fairer conditions and also criticize leaders who claim to speak for them. Equality is not an excuse to silence dissent.

Accept different defensible positions in Part 3 if the editorial uses accurate evidence from two dissidents and connects a proposed change to its argument. Do not treat the dissidents as sharing a single political program.