



# The Soviet Experiment: Russia, The USSR, and the Successor States

*Ronald Grigor Suny*

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The West has always had a difficult time understanding the Soviet Union. For decades Americans have known a Soviet Union clouded by ideological passions and a dearth of information. Today, with the revelations under glasnost and the collapse of the Communist empire, Americans are now able to see the former Soviet Union as a whole, and explore the turbulent tale of a Soviet history that has a beginning, a middle, and an end.

One of the eminent Soviet historians of our time, Ronald Grigor Suny takes us on a journey that examines the complex themes of Soviet history from the last tsar of the Russian empire to the first president of the Russian republic. He examines the legacies left by former Soviet leaders and explores the successor states and the challenges they now face. Combining gripping detail with insightful analysis, Suny focuses on three revolutions: the tumultuous year of 1917 when Vladimir Lenin led the Bolshevik takeover of the tsarist empire; the 1930s when Joseph Stalin refashioned the economy, the society, and the state; and the 1980s and 1990s when Mikhail Gorbachev's ambitious and catastrophic attempt at sweeping reform and revitalization resulted in the breakup of the Soviet Union led by Boris Yeltsin. He unravels issues, explaining "deeply contradictory" policies toward the various Soviet nationalities, including Moscow's ambivalence over its own New Economic Policy of the 1920s and the attempts at reform that followed Stalin's death. He captures familiar as well as little-known events, including the movement of the crowds on the streets of St. Petersburg in the February revolution; Stalin's collapse into a near-catatonic state after Hitler's much-predicted invasion; and Yeltsin's political maneuvering and public grandstanding as he pushed the disintegration of the Soviet Union and faced down his rivals.

Students and social scientists alike continue to be fascinated by the Soviet experiment and its meaning. *The Soviet Experiment* recovers the complexities and contradictions of the 70 years of Soviet Power, exploring its real achievements as well as its grotesque failings. Clearly written and well-argued, this narrative is complete with helpful anecdotes and examples that will not only engage students and offer them an opportunity to learn from new material but also afford them the opportunity to form their own opinions by reading the text and looking into the suggested readings. With insight and detail, Suny has constructed a masterful work, providing the fullest account yet of one of the greatest transformations of modern history.

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