

Communism

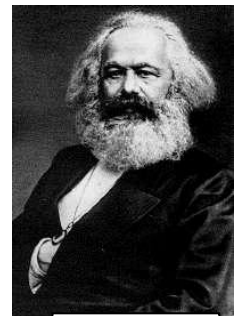
What is communism?

Communism is a political and economic system that is characterized by government ownership of land and capital (wealth). Communism is also a theory (set of ideas) concerned with social justice. In practice, however, Communism has been characterized by powerful and often brutal totalitarian governments. A totalitarian government is one in which the state has absolute control over almost every part of people's lives. Communism became one of the most powerful forces in the world and shaped much of history from the early 1900's to the 1990's. Some people have considered Communism the greatest threat to world peace. Others have looked on it as the world's greatest hope.

The term communism has several meanings. Communism can be a form of government, an economic system, a revolutionary movement, a way of life, or a goal or ideal. Communism is also a theory about how and why history develops, and in what direction it is developing. These ideas were developed mainly by Vladimir Lenin from the writings of Karl Marx. Lenin was a Russian revolutionary leader of the early 1900's, and Marx was a German social philosopher—a thinker who studies society and human behavior—of the 1800's.



Vladimir Lenin



Karl Marx



Russian economy poster –
Communist **Propaganda**

According to Communists, their long-range goal is a society that provides equality and economic security for all. To achieve this goal, Communism has required government ownership rather than private ownership of land, factories, and other economic resources, called the means of production. Government planning of economic activity and strict rule by a single party with Communist ideals are also features of Communist governments.

During the 1900's, millions of people lived under Communist rule. In 1917, Russia became the first state to be controlled by a Communist party. Russia joined with three other territories in 1922 to form the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (U.S.S.R.), or Soviet Union. By 1940, 12 more republics were added, and the Soviet Union had become one of the most powerful countries in the world.

The terms Communism and socialism are frequently confused. Communists and socialists both seek public ownership or regulation of the principal means of production. But most socialists favor peaceful and legal methods to achieve their goals, while Communists have often used force without regard to law.

Communism in theory

The Communism that developed in the 1900's was based on the theories of Marx as interpreted and modified by Lenin. These theories are often called Marxism-Leninism.

The ideas of Marx

Marx's basic ideas were first expressed in the Communist Manifesto (1848), a pamphlet that he wrote with Friedrich Engels, a German economist. Marx believed the only way to ensure a happy, harmonious society was to put the workers in control. His ideas were partly a reaction against hardships suffered by workers in England, France, and Germany during the Industrial Revolution, a period of rapid growth in manufacturing from the 1700's to the mid-1800's. Most

factory workers and miners during this period were poorly paid and worked long hours under unhealthful, and even dangerous, conditions.

European reality in the early 1900's

By the early 1900's, capitalism was more successful in Europe's industrialized nations than Marx had predicted. Economic modernization was causing the bourgeoisie to grow larger rather than smaller. The formation of labor unions, increased production of consumer goods, and the growth of democracy had led to a rise in living standards. Most Europeans felt an increasing sense of national pride, and few had turned away from their political systems.

Lenin's contributions

Lenin believed that capitalism in Europe had escaped failure because of imperialism—a policy in which one country extends influence over other countries. Capitalists from European imperialist countries underpaid workers they hired in African and Asian colonies. This practice helped the capitalists produce goods cheaply, which in turn kept prices in Europe low. Low prices contributed to a high standard of living for Europeans, which helped prevent unrest in Europe. But the unfair use of workers in nonindustrial societies created the possibility of a Communist revolution there, which, Lenin said, Marx had not foreseen.

Communism in practice

In practice, Communism has varied from one Communist country to another, but until the late 1980's, certain basic features of Communism were shared by all Communist countries.

One of these features was totalitarianism. In totalitarian countries, the government controls almost all aspects of people's lives. Communist countries also were party states. In a party state, the ruling party dominates all government bodies. The countries had centrally planned economies, also called **command** economies. In such economies, the state owned the means of production, and the government planned most economic activity. Finally, Communist countries valued cooperation and group needs over personal freedom. In other words, they considered the well-being of the state and society to be more important than that of the individual.

Restrictions on personal freedom

Communist leaders traditionally considered the needs of society more important than individual rights and liberties. As a result, personal freedoms were severely restricted. The amount of police repression varied, however. For example, when Joseph Stalin was dictator of the Soviet Union from 1929 to 1953, hundreds of thousands of Soviet citizens were executed. Millions died in forced labor camps. The government also ordered people to spy on their neighbors and encouraged them to inform on their family members. Stalin adopted these measures to eliminate real and imagined opposition to his policies. Similar conditions existed in China under Mao Zedong, who ruled that country from 1949 to 1976.

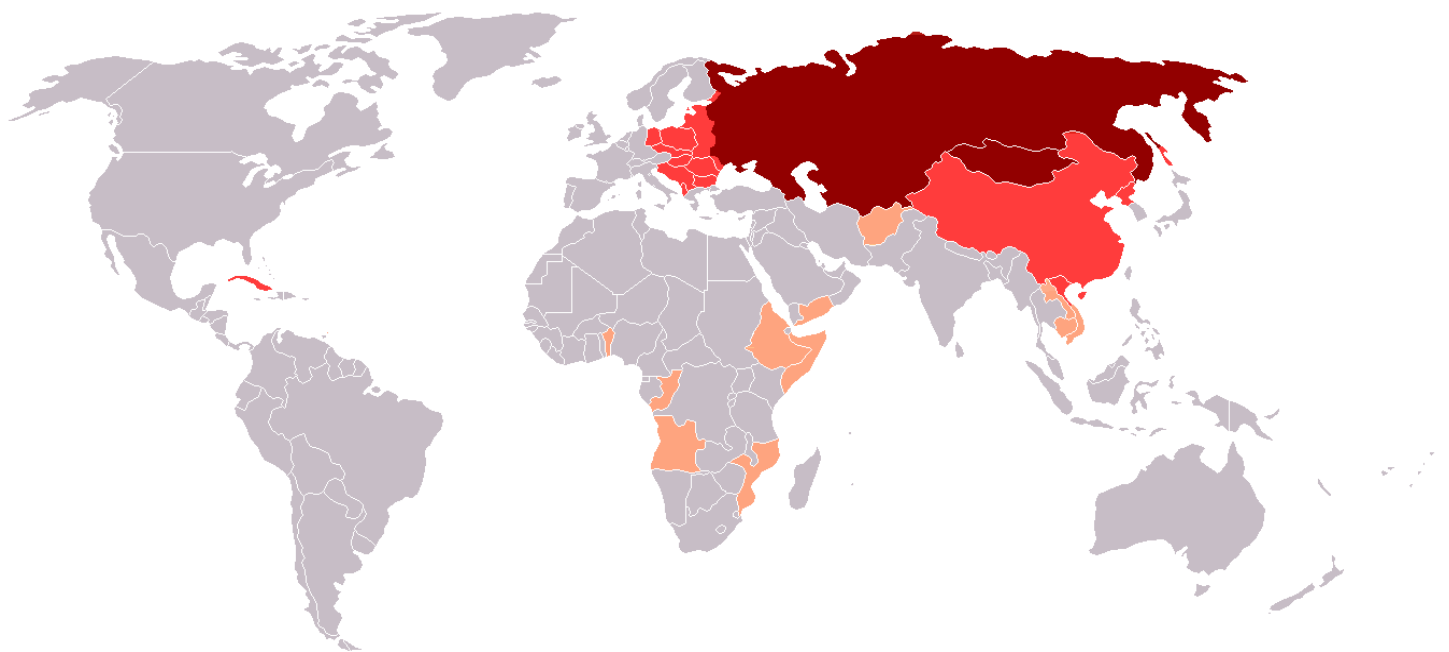
After Stalin's death in 1953, most Communist governments shifted from open terror to more subtle forms of repression. For example, they threatened to fire people from their jobs or to deny them a new apartment if they opposed the government. Governments also used material rewards to encourage obedience from citizens. A similar transition occurred in China after the death of Mao.

In some Communist countries and during some periods, individuals were free to do and say what they wished among friends and family, but people were not allowed to publicly criticize Communist party leaders or policies or to openly oppose the Communist system. Governments also did not permit people to establish organizations or publish ideas that opposed Communism. All these restrictions existed despite the fact that many Communist governments had constitutions claiming to guarantee the freedoms of speech, press, and assembly.

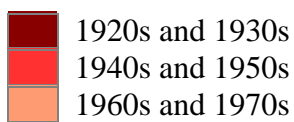
Communists in most countries discouraged religious worship because they considered religion a threat to Communism. Church members found it more difficult to advance in their jobs and were not allowed to join a Communist party.

Communism in the Soviet Union

In autumn 1917, the Bolsheviks, led by Lenin, seized power and established a Communist government. When the Bolsheviks took over, they had fewer than 300,000 members in a country of more than 160 million people. The coup succeeded partly because the provisional government leaders did not want to withdraw from the war, and they could not carry out reforms while the war continued. Lenin immediately pulled Russia out of World War I after he came to power. Consequently, reforms could be carried out somewhat more easily. The Bolsheviks also succeeded because of their effective organization and their appealing slogans, such as "**Bread, Peace, Land.**"



Expansion of Communism.



Taken from the English Wikipedia