Communism: Overview Essay, Research Paper

Communism: Overview

Communism is the belief that everyone in a society should be equal and

share their wealth. It is an outgrowth of socialism and Anabaptism (Laski 45).

It became a firmly rooted term after the Russian Revolution of 1917. According

to the words of Karl Marx, “From each according to his ability, to each

according to his needs” (monkeywrench@iww.org). These theories were spread by

Karl Marx. He believed that what a person made of himself reflected his effort

(McLellan 1). He also believed that communism, or the state of equality was

ones “final stage in life” (Leone 1).

Communism basically started in 1847, with the formation of the London

Communist League. This was an international association of worker, whose sole

purpose was to write a “theoretical and practical program which would serve as

the basis for uniting the working classes of Europe” (Leone 1). The London

Communist League asked Marx for help in drafting a document to represent their

standings. He composed the “Communist Manifesto” or “The Manifesto of the

Communist Party” (Leone 1).

The Russian Revolution helped foster communism. The Russian Revolution

started with the with the assassination of Rasputin. In March of 1917, the Duma

declares a prvisional government, including czars. During this period, there

were also massive strikes by the workers. It was furthered by the abdication of

Czar Nicholas. The Russian Revolution itself occured throughout 1917, with the

start of the March Revolution. In April of 1917, Lenin return from exil in

Switerland and denounced the established provisional government. The next

general step was the gaining of the seats in the Petograd Soviet Parliment by

the Bolsheviks. The Bolsheviks picked Lenin to then head the government, just

several days after the November Revolution. During this revolution the peasants

storm the palace, taking total control of the government. At this point, the

power was given to Lenin. Almost immediatly he issued the New Economic Plan,

which instituted the one party system or communism. They basicaly supported the

basic communist theories of Karl Marx, as interpreted by Lenin. He installed

many of his beliefs and helped reorganize the people, and essentially

emmancipatte the working class. He also is credited with the creation of the

Soviet Union. Unlike many of the countries previous leaders, he had more of the

peseants support. This was extrememly influential later in his career (McKay,

et all 880). When he came into power, he gave land to the peseants (Laski 48).

He even went as far to nationalize the banks of Russia.

Lenin had help with the running of his government, especially from

Joseph Stalin. Stalin helped to advise Lenin on almost all of his problems. He

even went as far as to help lead the Red Army in the Civil War (Brzezinski 25).

The theory of communism was developed by Karl Marx. He was born in

Trier of the Rhineland Germany to Jewish parents and spent his life in an effort

to improve the life of the average working man (Foreman 6). Marx is probably

best known for his masterpiece, the Communist Manifesto.

In the Communist Manifesto, Marx put forth his philosophy on society and

the way it would change. In essence, he developed “a set of proportions about

human society and the way it is supposed to behave over time” (Daniels 5).

Communist’s state that the “greatest freedom, freedom from want, can only be

realized went he abuses of big business are eliminated” (Leone 6). This would

require her citizens to give up everything they own, and trust completely in the

stability of their government.

The Marxist theory describes the cycle through which society revolves in

six basic steps. First, economic development would lead to the formation of a

class structure. This would occur because people would assume different roles

in the production of process, such as worker or supervisor. Second, the before

mentioned classes would struggle for dominance, and fight to gain power over the

other classes. Third, the classes would form political organizations to further

the cause of the class. Fourth, the economic conditions would change, causing

new classes to arise. Fifth, the addition of more classes would intensify the

struggle for dominance. And sixth, the lower class would rise up and overthrow

the upper class. The cycle would then begin again with the new upper class

bringing about economic prosperity (Daniels 6).

Marx cannot be given the entire credit for his ideas. He collaborated

with a fellow German, Fredrich Engles. Engles met Marx in 1844, at the tender

age of 24. From then on, the two combined ideas and wrote not only the

Communist Manifesto, but also the three-volume Das Kapital (Forman 138). Engles

served his purpose as the “literacy executor” of Marx well (Ebenstein 13).

Marx’s genius was refined by Engles’ brilliance.

However, through the course of time, Marx’s and Engles’ theories did not

remain as pure as they were penned. Marx himself declared “All I know is that I

am not a Marxist” (Daniels 4). A great amount of credit for the corruption of

true communism is due to Vladimir Illich Lenin. As the leader of the Russian

Revolution (Foreman 139), he felt it necessary to develop his own communist

theory, how appropriately named Leninism. Lenin’s communism was very different

from Marxism; the two terms cannot be considered identical or interchangeable

(Daniels 18). Russian Marxism generally tends to lean towards “liberation of

labor” (Laski 47).

The roots of communism can be traced back to the All-Russian Social

Democratic Party which split into the Bolshevik and Menshevik Parties.

Bolshevik, meaning majority and Menshevik meaning minority in representation.

The Bolshevik party had Lenin, who had just came back from Switzerland. In 1917,

he announced his April Theses’ to the public and changed the party’s name to the

All-Russian Communist Party. This party was modeled after the communist party

of Germany (Laski 47).

Lenin did agree with Marx on one principle; in a situation of

devastation considerations, it would be necessary of the e lower class to rise

up from their oppressing and overthrow the domination upper class. However, he

was of the opinion that if left to themselves, the masses would not become

revolutionaries (Daniels 20). Instead a very special elite group was necessary

to overthrow the autocracy for the lower class (Daniels 19). The working class

was involved in the struggle and would be inadequate to successfully revolt.

What was needed was an outside, “neutral” group to initiate the revolution.

Lenin stated that “class political consciousness can be brought to the workers

only from without, that is only from the outside of the economic struggle, from

the outside of the sphere of relations between workers and employers” (Daniels

20).

Lenin also disagreed with Marx on another concept. Lenin did not thing

that a revolution was a result of natural forces, as Marx did. His philosophy

stated that the revolution was the result of the purposeful intervention of the

elite group (Daniels 20).

Iosif Vissarionovich Dzhugashivili, more commonly called Joseph Stalin,

also rose as one of the most powerful men in the world, especially with his

commuist backing (Brzezinski 27). He was exiled to Siberia early in his

politiacl carrer, and returded to help support the Bolshevik party. He was

extrememly influential in decison making with Lenin, and in 1922 he was raised

to the Secretary-General of the Bolshevik party (Miller 68). Stalin became a

primary leader at Lenins death.

Stalin helped to create the Cold War Period. The cold war was

essentially created as a result of the soviets wanting to keep itself secure and

happy on their own. The Soviet Union also made demands from other countries to

help to build up their economy once agian. However, several countires,

including the United States and England, refused to grant these unreasonable

sums for the fear of a giant communist sphere. The countries drew up agreements

on boundries, of which the USSR also violated. This hate towards the United

States climaxed during the presidency of John F. Kennedy. The Soviets shadowed

the government of Cuba in 1959,creating a communist country under the

dictatorship of Fidel Castro. Under this time period the Bay of Pigs took place.

This was an ambushed attempt of the United States to help some rebel war groups

in Cuba to overthrough their dictator. They failed miserably causing many

deaths.

The Cold War continued with the Cuban Missil Crisis. During this Crisis

period the Soviets installed missiles on the shores of Cuba, aimed for major

United States cities. This “problem” was eliminated with talks between the

Kremlin and the White House, fortunaty a major disaster was prevented.

The Cold War ended with the presidency of Ronald Regan. He had outspent

the Soviets, thus putting them in a state of ruin, ending this period of hate.

Communism also developed in China. Around the turn of the 20th Century,

reformers began to voice their aspirations of a better China. By 1912 the Quing

Dynasty had fallen, the emperor had abdicated, and China had been declared a

republic, instituted by Sun Yat-Sen (Shanor 94). In 1921, the Chinese Communist

Party had become the largest formed in the world. (Shanor 95).

Unfortunately, the Chinese society was not ready for democracy. Those

holding offices of power accepted bribes and participated in other forms of

corruption. Warlords divided the country into unofficial petty kingdoms with

armies of peasants. The economic state of China made it much more profitable

for a peasant to work for the warlord that form the land (Shanor 95).

Because of the poor conditions, small Communist groups began to form in

China’s cities. At first, they were allies with Sun Yat-Sen and his

Nationalists. But the good feelings between the two parties deteriorated

quickly after Chiang Kai-Shek, Sun’s successor, ordered the Shanghai Massacre of

the Communists. Chiang spent the following years alternating between

negotiating with and fighting against the Communists. The situation became so

drastic that the Communists eventually fled during the Long March of 1934-35

(Shanor 95).

The United States, who was very Anti-Communist after WWII, supported

Chiang Kai-Shek. Over a period of four years, the US gave $2.5 billion to

support the Nationalist cause. Despite their efforts, the Communists eventually

overthrew the Nationalist government, forcing Chiang and followers to flee to

Taiwan. On October 1, 1949, Mao Zedong, the leader of the Communists,

proclaimed the country as the People’s Republic of China (Shanor 96).