Communism Essay, Research Paper

Communism has long been heralded in capitalist countries as the root of all evil. However, as with all phobias, this intrinsic fear of communism comes from lack of knowledge rather than sound reasoning. It is the same fear that gave the world the Cold War and McCarthy s Red Scare. The purpose of this paper is neither to support communism over capitalism nor the opposite, rather it is to inform the reader of communism s migration through time and hopefully assist the regression of such fear.

The ideology of communism came out of the minds of two men, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (Sowell, 11). Since Marx is the most widely known influence, he will be the one most referred to. It was Marx s belief that private property was the cause of poverty and degradation of the proletariat. Therefore, he came to settle on the idea that no one person should have control over production of goods, ownership of land, and management of funds. In that same token then, no one class should be allowed to have control over these things. He went on to comment that the exploitation of the working class must come to an end. That end would be achieved through revolution. Once this was achieved, everybody would work according to their abilities and then be paid accordingly (Marx 586-617). Soon after, however, technical innovations would create such abundance of goods that everyone works according to his abilities and receives according to his needs. Soon thereafter, money would have no place in society. People would be able to take what they want and in turn would be lacking nothing. Marx also believed that the pleasure of seeing the fruits of labor would be enough to cause man to work (Rieber, 56-62). Countries and people were soon to catch on to this ideology. The two most well know places were Russia and China.

Of the two, Russia was the first to adopt the communist beliefs. Russia already had a long history of peasant insurrections. Most of these uprisings though, were leaderless and highly unorganized. The motives of the rebels were vague and often confused. By the time the government made some improvements to help the peasants, it was too late. In 1917, due to the breakdown of the administration and military order, the peasants moved to carry out their own revolution. They tore down any form of legal and territorial authority and distributed the land in a rough but equal fashion. During this time, a man by the name of Georgi V. Plekanhov had secretly come into Russia bringing Karl Marx s books.

Once there, these books influenced young students who saw the revolution dependent on the proletariat, not the peasant class. One of the people influenced by Plekanhov was a man going by the name of Nikolai Lenin. His revolutionary ardor was strong and he went on to creat a group called the Bolsheviks and they are the ones who would create the revolution needed to change the system.

It began on March 6, 1917 when bread riots erupted in Petrograd, Russia and did not end until the United Soviet Socialist Republic was organized on December 30, 1922. On January 21, 1924, Lenin died and this complicated matters since two people were interested in Lenin s position. A power struggle ensued between Joseph Stalin and Leon Trotsky (Salisbury, xi). Stalin became the Bolshevik party general secretary in 1922, which was one step closer to being the next Lenin. In 1925, Stalin offered a more attractive solution to the Russian people than Trotsky (Rieber, 73-74). Thus in 1927, Stalin scored the first major victory for himself when the Fifteenth All-Union Congress of the Communist Party denounced all deviations of the Stalinist line. Trotsky and any ally of his were banished to the Russian provinces. Here Stalin s ruthless nature began to show. He completely expelled Trotsky from the Soviet Union and finally his fear of Trotsky-esque forced him to assassinate Leon Trotsky in 1940 (Kaiser, 246). However, even after Trotsky was assassinated Stalin s fears were never quite dissipated.

Stalin went on to establish a dictatorship, crushing any opposing voices within his party and his country. He would not stop there though, still being enough of a Marxist, he wanted to see the ultimate goal become a reality. He wanted to see a world wide socialist revolution. He and many other Soviet leaders held the furtherance of world revolution above the preservation of the dictatorship. It remained an important goal through the leadership of Khrushchev, Brezhnev, Andropov, and Chernenko. However, this came to the head during the leadership of Gorbachev.

Gorbachev had a country that was falling apart dumped into his lap. Dissension was widespread and in an effort to bring the country back to it s former glory, Gorbachev implemented a program known as Perestroika, or reconstructuring. Its aim was to make good on the promises of socialism or else it would sink to the status of a third world country. One part of Perestroika that was particularly odd was called Glasnost. The purpose of Glasnost was to hear constructive criticism in order to possibly try to implement the ideas in an effort to help the country out of their difficulties. This was much different from Stalin s views.

When western criticism said that Perestroika was slowing down, Glasnost went ahead at full speed, revealing not only the crimes of the Stalin era, but also the horrifying dimensions of the contemporary crisis. In foreign affairs, not only was there great progress on arms control, but also Soviet troops were withdrawn from Afghanistan. Most spectacular of all, in 1989, Gorbachev allowed Soviet control over Eastern Europe to evaporate, as communism was overthrown and independent governments were established in one satellite country after another.

In 1991, Gorbachev changed course as he came to realize that his only chance to preserve the union was to work with the leaders of the republics rather than against them. For many loyal members of the party and the security forces, as well as managers of industry and collective farms, the country as they had known it was on the brink of falling apart. The last stand of the old guard was an attempted coup in August 1991. It was easy for the plotters to take over the central government, but they found it impossible to topple Boris Yeltsin and the Russian Federation government. The coup collapsed within days, and the Communist party was outlawed. The fate of the August showed how little vitality was left in the Soviet Union s central government, and it was not long before appropriate conclusions were drawn. In another quieter coup in December, the leaders of Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus declared that a Commonwealth of Independent States would replace the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. The declaration only ratified the reality of republican independence.

Gorbachev bowed to the inevitable and resigned at the end of the year. The seventy-four year history of the Soviet Union had come to an end (Grolier). After Russia, China was the next major country to adapt to the communist system of beliefs.

It was on October 1, 1949 that Mao Tsetung pronounced the establishment of the new Chinese Communist state: the People s Republic of China. It was for this reason that Mao and over ten thousand people set off on what was to be called the Long March. They began in the Jiangxi province where their ranks rapidly grew and became known as the Fourth Red Army. It was comprised of peasants and soldiers who were in favor of a communist regime or were in opposition to Chiang Kai-shek s nationalist views. Mao s army never numbered more than 85,000 peasants, while Chiang s forces, the Kuomintang, numbered at least 200,000 well-equipped troops (Frankenstein 58-64). The odds were definitely against Mao. It was for this reason that he favored guerrilla warfare. Mao described these tactics in his Little Red Book:

When the enemy advanced, we retreat.

When he camps, we harass.

When he tires, we attack.

When he retires, we pursue.

Our weapons are supplied to us by the enemy.

In 1934, Chiang encircled the Jiangxi province in which Mao was camped and thus it was decided within his camp that they must break through Chiang s blockade lines. The 85,000 plus another 15,000 peasants poured through the breach that had been made. Within forty-eight hours, most of the people had broken through the lines. No one really knew what ahead, however, over six thousand miles, icy rivers, swampy marshes, and Kuomintang forces would leave only a handful alive at the end (Frankenstein 116-124). The Long March had begun. It would finally end in 1949, the same time the People s Republic of China was formed. Mao had come out on top through extraordinary means.

However, the civil war was not quite over. While living in Taiwan, Chiang was still getting backing from the United States of America and again took the title of President in 1950. Mao recognized, however, that he would need to set up a government immediately in order to support the close to one billion people living in China. He then turned to the Soviet Union for financial assistance. Mao went on to create the Great Cultural Revolution: an effort to get China up to the status of a major world power. This was a major motivating force for Mao until his death in 1976 (Frankenstein, 161-165). China and the communist party were without an outstanding leader for several years following Mao Tsetung s death. Finally, Deng Xiaoping eventually emerged as the paramount leader they were looking for in 1978. He promptly launched his economic reform plan. Under his leadership, China tried moving their economy from a sluggish Soviet-style centrally planned economy to a more productive and flexible economy with market elements, all within the framework of Communist control. The result has been a strong surge in production with industry posting some major gains. Deng s reforms have improved the livelihoods of many Chinese living in urban areas. There is no doubt that Deng had lead China through greatest period of modernization and foreign contact. One of the saddest days in Chinese history was the death of Deng Xiaoping on February 19, 1997.

While he had not been active for some time and had not appeared in public for three years prior to his death, the death of senior leaders had always had an unsettling impact on Chinese politics (CNN). On the other hand, Deng had retired in 1989 and he had placed Jiang Zemin in the powerful post of chairman of the Central Military Commission.

In 1993, Jiang was named president of China. Jiang s policy, like that of his mentor, was to instill market reforms while still keeping the country politically and socially conservative (CNN). This was going to be difficult though with Hong Kong having been returned to China on June 1, 1997. President Jiang Zemin himself will preside as the motherland reclaims a piece of itself, instantly replacing the councils and crown symbols of Britain rule with the new authority of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. If only it were that simple. The people of Hong Kong embrace neither of these extremes. They share pride in the reunification of China, but they harbor some misgivings about their new landlords, however, they are ready to give the new system a chance. Unfortunately the west is casting a skeptical eye.

If Beijing is ready to be welcomed into the community of nations with the stature its size and wealth ought to command, China will have to convince the west that it is ready and able to live by the international community s rules (McGeary, 186-192).

With the Soviet Union no longer in existence, the international community is turning their attention on to the last major communist nation that has influence. China will have to tread lightly, especially now with the return of a valuable port that was the refuge for millions of democratic citizens. China has promised a one country, two systems policy, but that is only drawing more criticism. Communism can no longer grow, it can only mature. However, this maturing process is turning it into more of a capitalist country.