History

Year 11

Major World Events of the 20th Century

PART 4: Communism



The History of Communism in Europe

Communism is a type of government and philosophy. Its goal is to form a society where everything is shared equally. All people are treated equally and there is little private ownership. In a communist government, the government owns and controls most everything including property, means of production, education, transportation, and agriculture.

Karl Marx is considered the Father of Communism. Marx was a German philosopher and economist who wrote about his ideas in a book called the Communist Manifesto in 1848. His communist theories have also become known as Marxism. Marx described ten important aspects of a communist government:

1. No private property
2. A single central bank High income tax that would rise significantly as you made more
3. All property rights would be confiscated
4. No inheritance rights
5. The government would own and control all communication and transportation
6. The government would own and control all education
7. The government would own and control factories and agriculture
8. Farming and regional planning would be run by the government
9. The government would tightly control labour

Marxism/communism is a worldview based on an economic perspective and dictatorship. It allows for no spiritual life in its philosophy. What follows is the true account of how the people of God were used to bring down an unjust and repressive empire in recent times.

Communism in Russia

Communism began in Russia with the rise of the Bolshevik Party led by Vladimir Lenin. They led the 1917 October Revolution that overthrew the current government and took power. Lenin was a follower of Marxist philosophies. His views on government became known as Marxism-Leninism.

Russia became known as the Soviet Union. In World War II Russia sided with the Allied Powers in order to help defeat Germany and Adolf Hitler. However, after the war the Soviet Union took control of several countries in Eastern Europe. They became known as the Eastern Bloc.

The Soviet Union became one of the world's two superpowers along with the United States. For many years they fought the west in what is today called the Cold War.

On 26 December 1991, the Soviet Union was formally dissolved and ceased to exist as a sovereign state.

Communist China

Another major country to be ruled by a communist government is China. The Communist Party gained control after winning the Chinese Civil War. The communists took over mainland China in 1950. Mao Zedong was the leader of communist China for many years. The type of communism in China at the time is often called Maoism. It was also heavily based off of Marxism.

Actual Results

The actual results of communist governments have been nothing like the theories of Marxism. The low-class people that were supposed to be helped by Marxism, were treated horribly by the leaders of the government. For example, it is estimated that Soviet Union leader Joseph Stalin had over 40 million people murdered for the "good of the state". Stalin created labor camps for anyone who disagreed with the government. He even created famines in order to break the will of the people and gain total control. Communist states generally have much less freedom. They prevent the practice of religion, order certain people to work certain jobs, and prevent people from moving around or moving to other countries. People lose all rights to ownership and government officials become incredibly powerful.

Interesting Facts About Communism

- Other communist countries include Cuba, Vietnam, North Korea, and Laos.
- The Chinese government has been under fire for years for human rights violations. This included many executions, detaining prisoners without trial, and wide-ranging censorship.

Questions

1) Who is considered the Father of Communism?

2) Which of the following is NOT an important element of communism?

a) Dictatorship b) government control of property c) freedom of religion

3) Who was the leader of the Bolshevik Revolution who brought communism to Russia?

4) What is the name given to the non-fighting war between the west and the Soviet Union to prevent the spread of communism?

5) True or false: Communist countries generally have no freedom of the press or freedom of speech.

6) What war did the Communist Party of China win in order to take control of mainland China?

7) Who was the first leader of Communist China?

8) True or false: The results seen by countries ruled by communist governments have been exactly like the peaceful utopia for all described by Karl Marx.

9) Around how many people did Soviet Union leader Joseph Stalin have killed for the good of the state?

Check your answers

1. Karl Marx

2. c) Freedom of religion

3. Vladimir Lenin

4. Cold War

5. TRUE

6. The Chinese Civil War

7. Mao Zedong

8. FALSE

9. 40 million

The Berlin Wall

The Berlin Wall was built by the communist government of East Berlin in 1961. The wall separated East Berlin and West Berlin. It was built in order to prevent people from fleeing East Berlin. In many ways it was the perfect symbol of the "Iron Curtain" that separated the democratic western countries and the communist countries of Eastern Europe throughout the Cold War.

The Iron Curtain with its Berlin Wall savagely divided the peoples of Europe into two blocks, without respect for human contact between families, communities or nations.

In the 1980s, God started a series of events in his church. From Gdansk (Poland) through Leipzig (East Germany) to Timisoara (Romania), God tore down the Iron Curtain and the infamous symbol of tyranny, the Berlin Wall, which divided Europe. Underpinning this physical barrier was the ideology of atheistic communism/Marxism. God answered the prayers of His people: down came the Wall and with it the atheist government was smashed to pieces.

Current Communist Countries: China, Cuba, Laos, North Korea, and Vietnam.

Former European Communist countries (by current name):

- **Formerly part of the Soviet Union:** Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Estonia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan.

- **Soviet-controlled Eastern bloc countries:** Bulgaria, Czech Republic, East Germany, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia.

- **The Balkans:** Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Rep. of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Slovenia.

The Cold War and the fall of the Berlin Wall

The Berlin Wall was built by the communist government of East Berlin in 1961. The wall separated East Berlin (the Communist part of Germany) and West Berlin (the free part of Germany). It was built in order to prevent people from fleeing from East Berlin to the west. In many ways it was the perfect symbol of the "Iron Curtain" that separated the democratic (free) western countries and the communist countries of Eastern Europe throughout the Cold War.

How it all started

After World War II the country of Germany ended up dividing into two separate countries. East Germany became a communist country under the control of the Soviet Union. At the same time West Germany was a democratic country and allied with Britain, France, and the

United States. The initial plan was that the country would eventually be reunited, but this didn't happen for a long time.

The City of Berlin

Berlin was the capital of Germany. Even though it was located in the eastern half of the country, the city was controlled by all four major powers; the Soviet Union, the United States, Britain, and France. As people in East Germany began to realize that they did not want to live under the rule of the Soviet Union and communism, they started to leave the eastern part of the country and move to the west. These people were called defectors. If caught they would be shot. Over time more and more people left. The Soviet and East German leaders began to worry that they were losing too many people.

Over the course of the years 1949 to 1959, over 2 million people left the country. In 1960 alone, around 230,000 people defected. Although the East Germans tried to keep people from leaving, it was fairly easy for people to leave the city of Berlin because the inside of the city was controlled by all four major powers.

Building the Wall

Finally, the Soviets and the East German leaders had had enough. On August 12th and 13th of 1961 they built a wall around Berlin to prevent people from leaving. At first the wall was just a barbed wire fence. Later it was rebuilt with concrete blocks 12 feet high and four feet wide. There were many guard towers along the wall. Guards were ordered to shoot anyone attempting to escape. It is estimated that around 5000 people escaped over or through the wall during the 28 years it stood. Around 200 were killed trying to escape.

Checkpoint Charlie was the Western Bloc's name for the best-known Berlin Wall crossing point between East Berlin and West Berlin during the Cold War (1947–1991). People tried all kinds of ways of getting across the border, such as squeezing themselves into suitcases and hiding in the boot of a car while a compliant driver drove them across. The Checkpoint Charlie Museum exists in Berlin today, where you can see photographs of how people escaped. But of course, many did not escape. They were shot.

The wall torn down in 1987

President Ronald Reagan gave a speech in Berlin where he asked the leader of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev, to "Tear down this Wall!" Around that time the Soviet Union was beginning to collapse. They were losing their hold on East Germany. A few years later on November 9, 1989 the announcement was made. The borders were open and people could freely move between Eastern and Western Germany. Much of the wall was torn down by people chipping away as they celebrated the end to a divided Germany. On October 3, 1990 Germany was officially reunified into a single country.

Interesting Facts About the Berlin Wall

- Around 20% of the East German population left the country in the years leading up to the building of the wall.

- The country of East Germany was officially called the German Democratic Republic or GDR.
- There were also many guard towers along the wall. Guards were ordered to shoot anyone attempting to escape.
- It is estimated that around 5000 people escaped over or through the wall during the 28 years it stood. Around 200 were killed trying to escape.

Questions

1) Berlin is the capital of what European country?

2) Why did East Germany build the Berlin Wall?

3) What country had control over the government of East Germany?

4) Around how many people left East Germany through the city of Berlin in the ten years prior to the wall being built?

5) What type of government was it that people were trying to escape from?

6) What year did East Germany first build the wall?

7) True or false: East German guards in guard towers were told to shoot anyone they saw trying to escape over the wall.

8) What US President asked Soviet Union leader Mikhail Gorbachev to tear down the wall?

9) Around what percentage of the East German population left the country prior to the wall being built?

10) What happened on October 3, 1990?

Check your answers

1. Germany

2. To keep people from escaping to West Germany

3. Soviet Union

4. 2 million

5. Communist

6. 1961

7. TRUE

8. Ronald Reagan

9. 20%

10. Germany was officially reunited into a single country

Further Activities:

1. What is the meaning of the term “Iron Curtain” and how does this title reflect the activities of the Communist government?

2. Draw a map of the two former German nations. i.e. the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic. Mark out the divided city of Berlin.

3. What are the common attributes of the pastors and believers who opposed their Marxist/communist governments?



European Communist leaders

Karl Marx (1818 – 1883), was a German philosopher, social and political theorist, economist, journalist, and a revolutionary socialist. He is best-known for the 1848 pamphlet The Communist Manifesto (written with Friedrich Engels), and his books of three volumes called Das Kapital (1867–1894). In his writings he criticised materialism and capitalism, and promoted socialism. Marx's ideas, collectively known as Marxism, have had enormous influence, and were a forerunner of Communism.

Vladimir Lenin, **1870 – 1924),** influenced by Marxism, was a Russian revolutionary, politician and political theorist. He was the first head of government of Soviet Russia from 1917 until his death in 1924 and of the Soviet Union from 1922 until his death. As the

Bolsheviks' founder, Lenin led the October Revolution, which established the world's first communist state. His government won the Russian Civil War and created a one-party state under the Communist Party.

Lenin's government abolished private ownership of land, nationalised major industry and banks, and promoted world revolution through Communist ideology. Lenin established a dictatorship which oversaw mass killings and political repression.

Joseph Stalin (1878 – 1953) became leader of the Soviet Union after the founder of the Soviet Union, Vladimir Lenin, died in 1924. Stalin ruled up until his own death in 1953. He was known as a brutal leader who was responsible for the deaths of over 20 million people.

Where did Stalin grow up?

He was born in Gori, Georgia (a country just south of Russia) in 1878. His birth name was Losif Jughashvili. Stalin's parents were poor and he had a rough childhood. At the age of 7 he got the disease smallpox. He survived, but his skin was covered in scars. He later went to seminary to become a priest, however, he was expelled for being a radical.

The Revolution

After leaving the seminary, Stalin joined up with the Bolshevik revolutionaries. This was an underground group of people that followed the communist writings of Karl Marx and were led by Vladimir Lenin. Stalin became a leader within the Bolsheviks. He led riots and strikes and even raised money by robbing banks and other crimes. Soon Stalin became one of Lenin's top leaders.

In 1917, the Russian Revolution took place. This was when the government led by the Tsars was overthrown and Lenin and the Bolsheviks came into power. Russia was now called the Soviet Union and Joseph Stalin was a major leader in the government.

In 1924 Vladimir Lenin died. Stalin had been General Secretary of the Communist Party since 1922. He had been growing in power and control. After Lenin's death, Stalin took over as sole leader of the Soviet Union.

Industrialization

In order to strengthen the Soviet Union, Stalin decided that the country should move away from agriculture and become industrialized. He had factories built through the country. These factories would help the Soviet Union to fight the Germans in World War II.

Purges and Murder

Stalin was one of the most brutal leaders in world history. He had anyone that didn't agree with him killed. He also caused famines in areas of the country so people he wanted dead would starve. Throughout his rule he would order purges where millions of people he

thought were against him would be killed or put into slave labour camps. Historians aren't sure how many people he had killed, but they estimate between 20 to 40 million.

World War II

At the start of World War II, Stalin formed an alliance with Adolf Hitler and Germany. However, Hitler hated Stalin and the Germans made a surprise attack on the Soviet Union in 1941. In order to fight off the Germans, Stalin joined the Allies of Britain and the United States. After a terrible war, where many on both sides died, the Germans were defeated.

After World War II, Stalin set up puppet governments in the Eastern European countries that the Soviet Union had taken from Germany. These governments were run by the Soviet Union. This started the Cold War between the two world superpowers, the Soviet Union and the United States.

Questions

1) Joseph Stalin was the leader of what country?

2) Which of the following best describes Joseph Stalin's childhood and family?

3) Joseph Stalin attended school to train for what occupation?

4) Stalin became a leader in what group of revolutionaries?

5) Who was the leader of the Soviet Union prior to Joseph Stalin?

6) What major change did Joseph Stalin make in the Soviet economy?

7) Who did Stalin ally with at the start of World War II?

8) Why did Stalin change sides during World War II?

9) What war began between the United States and the Soviet Union after World War II?

10) True or False: Stalin was not his birth name, but came from a combination of the Russian word for 'steel' and 'Lenin.'

Check your answers

1. Soviet Union

2. His family was poor and he battled the disease smallpox

3. Priest

4. Bolsheviks

5. Vladimir Lenin

6. Moved from agriculture to industry

7. Germany

8. Because he was attacked by Adolf Hitler and the Germans

9. Cold War

10. TRUE

Communism and Christianity

Throughout the history of the Soviet Union (1922–1991), there were periods when Soviet authorities suppressed and persecuted various forms of Christianity to different extents depending on state interests. Soviet Marxist-Leninist policy consistently advocated the control, suppression, and ultimately, the elimination of religious beliefs, and it actively encouraged the propagation of Marxist-Leninist atheism in the Soviet Union.

The state advocated the destruction of religion, and to achieve this goal, it officially denounced religious beliefs as superstitious and backward. The Communist Party destroyed churches, synagogues, and mosques, ridiculed, harassed, incarcerated and executed religious leaders, as part of the promotion of state atheism. Religious beliefs and practices persisted among some of the population.

From 1917 until 1991, Christians were imprisoned by Soviet authorities for numerous reasons such as protesting antireligious policies, leading congregations, conducting missionary work, organizing Sunday schools, mobilizing the youth to Christian societies, and political opposition to Soviet power.

Official Soviet stance

The Soviet regime had a firm commitment to the complete annihilation of religious institutions and ideas. Communist ideology could not coexist with the continued influence of religion even as an independent institutional entity, so "Lenin demanded that communist propaganda must employ militancy and irreconcilability towards all forms of religion", and

that was called "militant atheism". Militant atheism became central to the ideology of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and a high priority policy of all Soviet leaders.

The state established atheism as the only scientific truth. Marxist ideology as interpreted by Lenin and his successors regarded religion as an obstacle to the construction of a communist society, putting an end to all religions (and replacing them with atheism. The state sought to control the activities of religious bodies and interfere in their internal affairs, with the ultimate goal of making them disappear

Soviet tactics

Tactics varied over the years and they became more moderate or harsher at different times. Some common tactics included confiscating church property, ridiculing religion, harassing believers, and promoting atheism through the educational system.

Some actions against Orthodox priests and believers included torture, execution or sending them to prison camps, labour camps and mental hospitals. Many Orthodox (along with peoples of other faiths) were also subjected to psychological punishment or torture and mind control experimentation in order to force them to give up their religious convictions

In the Soviet Union, in addition to the methodical closing and destruction of churches, the charitable and social work which was formerly done by churches was taken over by the state. As with all private property, Church-owned property was confiscated and put to public use. The few places of worship were still left open but were legally viewed as state property. The government allowed formal church services to take place here but were kept under tight control, making sure that church ministers said nothing against the government. These churches were there to give a good impression to Western nations.

In the period which followed the Second World War, Protestant Christians in the USSR (Baptists, Pentecostals, Adventists etc.) were forcibly sent to mental hospitals, or they were tried and imprisoned (often for refusing to enter military service). Some were forcibly deprived of their parental rights.

The work of Christian Bible smugglers

Because Bibles were banned in Communist countries, Christians from democratic countries took on secret missions to get Bibles into the hands of Christians in the Underground Church. Their mission was dangerous, knowing they could face execution of caught. One of the most famous Christians who worked behind the Iron Curtain in this time was a Dutch Christian called Brother Andrew.

Brother Andrew's work behind the Iron Curtain was a testament to his unwavering faith and commitment to spreading the Gospel. His journey involved smuggling Bibles and Christian literature into Communist countries, providing hope and support to persecuted Christians. His trademark prayer, "Lord, in my luggage I have Scripture I want to take to Your children,"

became a powerful tool in his ministry. Brother Andrew's efforts not only delivered Bibles but also trained pastors and provided financial assistance to Christians in need. His work has had a lasting impact, bringing revival and hope to those who faced persecution.

His story is told in the book “God’s Smuggler”.

The story of Brother Andrew (1928-2022) – God’s Smuggler

In 1955, a young Dutch missionary went to a Communist youth congress in Poland, at that time a part of the Soviet bloc. But he wasn’t a communist: he was a Christian. His suitcase contained his Bible, a change of clothes and hundreds of tracts entitled The Way of Salvation, which he intended to give away.

The trip was to change his life. Behind the Iron Curtain, he discovered churches desperately in need of Bibles, support and prayer. Above all, he found a group of Christians who felt isolated and alone and who thought the rest of the world had forgotten them.

One evening during that first visit, he went to a Baptist church in Warsaw where he was invited to speak. He tells the story in his best-selling book God’s Smuggler: “At the end of my little talk the pastor said the most interesting thing of all, ‘We want to thank you,’ he said, ‘for being here. Even if you had not said a word, just seeing you would have meant so much. We feel at times as if we are all alone in our struggle.”

That young man became known as Brother Andrew. And his trip changed the world.

At the end of the trip, watching many thousands of delegates to the Youth Congress marching in a parade, Brother Andrew prayed about what God wanted him to do. He opened his Bible and found the passage which he came to see as a mission: “Wake Up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die.” Revelation 3:2

In subsequent years he was to travel many times behind the Iron Curtain, courageously putting his life on the line to smuggle Bibles at the height of the Cold War. His work went on to span many decades and geographic locations. In God’s Smuggler, Brother Andrew’s autobiography chronicling those early years, he details dangerous border crossings in his blue VW Beetle – which became known as ‘the miracle car’, for its ability to miraculously keep going. He developed a trademark prayer to say as he snuck Bibles and Christian literature across the border:

The story of Brother Andrew (1928-2022) – God’s Smuggler

“Lord, in my luggage I have Scripture I want to take to Your children. When You were on earth, You made blind eyes see. Now, I pray, make seeing eyes blind. Do not let the guards see those things You do not want them to see.”

As the work grew he was joined by others and began a work of smuggling Bibles to believers in Communist countries. And today, Brother Andrew’s small Dutch mission has become an

international ministry called Open Doors. working in more than 60 nations to strengthen the Persecuted Church.

“When I first discovered a persecuted church behind the Iron Curtain the need was for Bibles,” says Brother Andrew. “But as our ministry expanded, other needs emerged. For example, in some countries pastors have little or no seminary training. We provide them with training so they can be more effective leaders of their congregations. In other regions Christians are discriminated against, denied education and quality job opportunities. So we may strengthen the church by providing small loans to help Christians start businesses. The needs and thus the strategies vary from country to country.”

Today, of course, Europe has changed. The main threat to Christians today comes not from Communism, but from radical Islam. Brother Andrew has travelled extensively in the Islamic world, talking to the leaders of Hamas, Islamic Jihad and Hezbollah. He is among the few Western leaders to regularly travel to the Middle East as an ambassador for Christ to these groups. He has also broken Christian religious barriers by preaching in Catholic and Coptic Orthodox churches.

Brother Andrew has received many honours and awards. He was knighted by Queen Beatrix of The Netherlands and, in 1997, he received of the World Evangelical Fellowship’s Religious Liberty Award, in recognition of his lifetime service to the Persecuted Church. But perhaps the recognition that pleases him most is the copies of the KGB reports, which he obtained after the fall of the Iron Curtain. There were more than 150 pages about him, detailing his work in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. They knew a lot about ‘Brother Andrew’, and yet they were still not able to stop his work.

He often has said, “Our very mission is called ‘Open Doors’ because we believe that any door is open, anytime and anywhere. I literally believe that. Every door is open to go in and proclaim Christ, as long as you are willing to go and are not worried about coming back.”

Brother Andrew’s story is extraordinary. But he himself is always at pains to stress that it was simply because he followed God.

“The real calling,” he has said, “is not a certain place or career but to everyday obedience. And that call is extended to every Christian, not just a select few.”

He would tell us as he has told many others, “The Bible is full of ordinary people who went to impossible places and did wondrous things simply because they decided to follow Jesus.”

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Questions

1. What actions did the Soviet Communist Party take to try and eradicate Christianity?

2. Why do you think the government allowed a few tightly controlled churches to exist?

3. What were some of the penalties for Baptists, Pentecostals and other true Christians who engaged in worship?

4. Describe the work of Brother Andrew.

5. The KGB was the official security agency in the Soviet Union. What do you think their reports would have to say about Brother Andrew?

The Underground Church

What Is the Underground Church?

The "underground Church" is a term used to describe Christian communities that meet in secret due to government persecution or societal hostility toward Christianity. In countries where Christianity is illegal practicing faith openly can result in arrest, violence, or even death, these churches serve as hidden sanctuaries for believers. The underground Church is not an official organization but rather a movement of believers who, despite oppressive regimes and societal pressures, continue to gather in secret for worship, prayer, and fellowship.

These hidden gatherings can take place in homes, caves, remote areas, or even disguised as regular social meetings. The locations are often kept secret to avoid detection, and believers are cautious about whom they trust, knowing that a single misstep could destroy the entire church community. In some places, Christians use coded language, secret signals, or encrypted communication to organize meetings and share resources like Bibles and discipleship materials.

Why Underground Churches are vital to persecuted Christians

For Christians in regions where religious freedom is non-existent, the underground Church is crucial for their survival—both spiritually and physically. These secret gatherings allow believers to continue practicing their faith in a hostile environment where attending state-approved churches often requires compromising on major Christian beliefs.

In places like China, where the government regulates churches through the state-controlled Three-Self Patriotic Movement, underground churches offer an alternative for Christians who seek to worship freely without government interference. These hidden communities

are essential for worship and play a crucial role in evangelizing new believers and discipling young Christians, keeping the flame of faith alive in regions hostile to the Gospel.

The Underground Church in USSR

Until the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991, true Christians had to worship in secret to avoid persecution and imprisonment. A few Russian Orthodox State churches operated during the Communist regime, but these were formal churches that the government kept an eye on, set up for the purpose of making the world think the government allowed freedom of religion. After 1991, with the break-up of the Communist regime, and the establishment or 15 independent countries, religious freedom became possible.

The Break-up of the Soviet Union (USSR)

The Soviet Union, also known as the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), existed from 1922 to 1991 and was the world's largest country, covering a vast area from the Pacific Ocean to the Afghan border. At its peak, the USSR included 15 republics, each with its own unique history and culture. The republics were formed through various means, including territorial acquisitions during World War II and political decisions by the central government. The USSR was a one-party state led by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, and its dissolution in 1991 led to the formation of 15 post-Soviet republics.

List of the 15 Republics, as they are known today:

- Russia
- Ukraine
- Belarus
- Uzbekistan
- Kazakhstan
- Georgia
- Azerbaijan
- Lithuania
- Moldova
- Latvia
- Kyrgyzstan
- Tajikistan
- Armenia
- Turkmenistan
- Estonia

The Soviet Union formally dissolved on December 26, 1991, resulting in 15 independent republics and the creation of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

The collapse of Communism in Europe

The collapse of the Soviet Union started in the late 1980s and was complete when the country broke up into 15 independent states on December 25, 1991. This signaled the end of the Cold War between the Soviet Union and the United States.

Mikhail Gorbachev was elected General Secretary of the Soviet Union in 1985. When he took over the Soviet Union economy was in bad shape and his idea was to reform the economy and modernize the political situation in the country.

Gorbachev allowed more freedom of speech and openness in government. Government officials would be held accountable to the people for their actions. People could protest and the media could report on issues for the first time. People could express their desire for independence.

The other major reform was the restructuring of the Soviet economy to work more efficiently. He allowed some private ownership and released some of the tight control the government had on the economy. However, the people and economy of the Soviet Union were used to the government doing everything, so things got worse before they got better.

The first states to demand their freedom were the Baltic states of Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia. The central government of the Soviet Union began to feel the pressure of so many states wanting independence.

In August of 1991, some hardline communists kidnapped Gorbachev and announced to the world that he was too sick to govern. They would be taking over. When the Soviet citizens began to protest, the hardliners called in the military to shut them down. However, the soldiers refused to shoot and arrest their own people. Without the military to back them up, the takeover had failed.

The Soviet Union broke up on December 24, 1991. At the same time Mikhail Gorbachev announced his resignation. The Soviet Union divided up into 15 separate independent countries including: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Estonia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan.

Causes of the Breakup

The collapse of the Soviet Union was driven by a combination of economic stagnation, political reforms, ethnic nationalism, and external pressures. By the 1980s, the Soviet economy faced chronic inefficiency, high military spending, and technological lag compared to the West, which strained resources and reduced living standards. Politically, Prime Minister Mikhail Gorbachev's reforms—called "perestroika" (economic restructuring) and openness)—intended to modernize the system, inadvertently weakened central authority

and exposed systemic flaws. Rising ethnic nationalism within the 15 constituent republics further destabilized the union, as many sought sovereignty and independence.

Key Events Leading to Dissolution

1988 - Estonia declared sovereignty, followed by Lithuania and Latvia

1991 - leaders of Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus signed an agreement recognizing each other's independence and establishing the CIS to replace the Soviet Union.

Final Steps: Kazakhstan was the last republic to declare independence on December 16, 1991. Gorbachev resigned on December 25, and the Soviet parliament formally dissolved the union on December 26, 1991.

Consequences

The breakup ended the Cold War era, leaving the United States as the sole superpower and fundamentally reshaping global geopolitics. The former Soviet republics transitioned to varying degrees of democracy and market economies, though many faced economic hardship, political instability, and regional conflicts, particularly in the Caucasus and Central Asia. Russia inherited the Soviet nuclear arsenal and assumed the USSR's seat at the United Nations.

The breakup of the Soviet Union remains one of the most significant geopolitical events of the 20th century, marking the end of a superpower and the beginning of a new international order.

Questions

1. What was the main cause of the breakup of the Soviet Union?

2. What effects did it have?

3. What is the meaning of the last paragraph?

4. Find out the dictionary definition of Socialism. What similarities are there between Socialism and Communism?

The Arms Race

During the Cold War the United States and the Soviet Union became engaged in a nuclear arms race. They both spent billions and billions of dollars trying to build up huge stockpiles of nuclear weapons. Near the end of the Cold War the Soviet Union was spending around 27% of its total gross national product on the military. This was crippling to their economy and helped to bring an end to the Cold War.

The Nuclear Bomb

The United States was the first to develop nuclear weapons through the Manhattan Project during World War II. The US ended the war with Japan by dropping nuclear bombs on the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Nuclear bombs are extremely powerful weapons that can destroy an entire city and kill tens of thousands of people. The only time nuclear weapons have been used in war was at the end of World War II against Japan. The Cold War was predicated on the fact that neither side wanted to engage in a nuclear war that could destroy much of the civilized world.

The Start of the Arms Race

On August 29, 1949 the Soviet Union successfully tested its first atomic bomb. The world was shocked. They did not think the Soviet Union was this far along in their nuclear development. The Arms Race had begun.

In 1952 the United States detonated the first hydrogen bomb. This was an even more powerful version of the nuclear bomb. The Soviets followed up by exploding their first hydrogen bomb in 1953.

In the 1950s both countries worked on developing Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles or ICBMs. These missiles could be launched from long range, as far away as 3,500 miles.

Defence

As both sides continued to develop new and more powerful weapons, the fear of what would happen if war broke out spread throughout the world. Militaries began to work on defences such as large radar arrays to tell if a missile had been launched. They also worked on defence missiles that could shoot down ICBMs.

At the same time, people built bomb shelters and underground bunkers where they could hide in the case of nuclear attack. Deep underground facilities were built for high-ranking government officials where they could reside safely.

Mutual Assured Destruction

One of the major factors in the Cold War was termed Mutual Assured Destruction or MAD. This meant that both countries could destroy the other country in the case of attack. It wouldn't matter how successful the first strike was, the other side could still retaliate and destroy the country which first attacked. For this reason, neither side ever used nuclear weapons. The cost was too high.

During the Cold War, three other nations also developed the nuclear bomb and had their own nuclear weapons. These included Great Britain, France, and the People's Republic of China.

Détente and Arms Reduction Talks

As the Arms Race heated up, it became very expensive for both countries. In the early 1970s both sides realized that something had to give. The two sides began to talk and take a softer line towards each other. This easing of relations was called détente.

In order to try and slow down the Arms Race, the countries agreed to reduce arms through the SALT I and SALT II agreements. SALT stood for Strategic Arms Limitation Talks.

End of the Arms Race

For the most part, the Arms Race came to an end with the collapse of the Soviet Union at the end of the Cold War in 1991.

Interesting Facts About the Arms Race

- The Manhattan Project was top secret, even Vice President Truman didn't learn about it until he became president. However, Soviet Union leader Joseph Stalin's spies were so good, he knew all about it.
- The US B-52 bomber could fly 6,000 miles and deliver a nuclear bomb.
- It is estimated that by 1961 there were enough nuclear bombs built to destroy the world.
- Today India, Pakistan, North Korea, and Israel also have nuclear capability.

Questions

1) What two countries were most involved in the Arms Race during the Cold War?

2) What type of weapon was designed by the Manhattan Project?

3) What country had two atomic bombs dropped on it during World War II?

4) What did MAD stand for in regards to the Arms Race?

5) The easing of relations between the east and west in the Cold War was termed:

6) True or False: The Soviet Union knew all about the Manhattan Project even though it was top secret.

7) Besides the United States and the Soviet Union, what other countries had nuclear bombs during the Cold War?

8) What was the acronym for the arms reduction talks between the United States and the Soviet Union?

9) What event effectively ended the Arms Race?

10) True or False: Both sides would have suffered great losses in the event of a nuclear war.

Check your answers

1. United States and Soviet Union

2. Atomic bomb

3. Japan

4. Mutually Assured Destruction

5. Detente

6. TRUE

7. France, Great Britain, and China

8. SALT

9. The collapse of the Soviet Union

10. TRUE

Communism Today

Which countries are Communist in 2026?

Communist states in 2026 operate under Marxist-Leninist principles, with the Communist Party at the helm of governance. These countries focus on state control of key industries, centralized planning, and the pursuit of social equality, often resisting Western influence.

Korea: The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) is Governed by the Workers' Party of Korea, the DPRK follows the Juche ideology, emphasizing self-reliance and independence. While the state remains centralized, it continues to uphold socialist principles in governance, with a focus on national sovereignty and anti-imperialism. In recent years its economy has been increasingly opened to private enterprise in both official and unofficial channels.

China: The Communist Party of China (CPC) leads the country under "socialism with Chinese characteristics." While incorporating market reforms, the CPC remains the dominant political force, guiding the nation's policies on economic growth, national security, and global influence.

Cuba: The Communist Party of Cuba governs with a focus on social equality, education, and healthcare. Despite economic hardships due to the U.S. embargo, Cuba remains committed to socialism, emphasizing the protection of its revolutionary gains and national sovereignty, while embarking on market-based reforms.

Vietnam: The Communist Party of Vietnam governs with a mixture of Marxist-Leninist principles and market-oriented reforms. The state focuses on poverty reduction, rural development, and national unity.

Laos: The Lao People's Revolutionary Party governs as a one-party socialist state. Laos prioritizes rural development and poverty alleviation while maintaining a strong commitment to socialist values.

What is the difference between Communism and Socialism?

Communism and socialism are political and economic systems that share certain ideologies, including greater equality in the distribution of income.

Both are rejections of capitalism, instead giving economic power to the working class.

Historically, communism has called for the transfer of power to the working class through revolutionary rather than gradual means, as socialism strove for.

Both communism and socialism advocate public control of the means of production, although socialism allows for the continued existence of capitalism in some parts of the economy.

In reality, communist systems have not been very successful to date.

Communism - definition

Pure communism is an economic, political, and social system in which most or all property and resources are collectively owned by a class-free society rather than by individual citizens. According to the theory developed by the German philosopher, economist, and political theorist Karl Marx, pure communism results in a society in which all people are equal, and there is no need for money or the accumulation of individual wealth. There is no private ownership of economic resources, with a central government controlling all facets of production. Economic output is distributed according to the needs of the people. Social friction between white and blue-collar workers and between rural and urban cultures will be eliminated, freeing each person to achieve his or her highest human potential.

Under pure communism, the central government provides the people with all basic necessities, such as food, housing, education, and medical care, thus allowing the people to equally share the benefits of collective labour. Free access to these necessities depends on constant advances in technology contributing to ever-greater production.

Socialism - definition

Socialism is an economic system where everyone in society equally owns the factors of production. The ownership is acquired through a democratically elected government. It could also be a cooperative or public corporation in which everyone owns shares. As in a command economy, the socialist government employs centralized planning to allocate resources based on both the needs of individuals and society as a whole. Economic output is distributed according to each individual's ability and level of contribution.

Which Countries Are Socialist in 2026?

Socialist countries implement significant state control over resources and industries, emphasizing social equity and welfare, often blending state control with market-oriented reforms.

Venezuela: The United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) governs the country, continuing the legacy of Hugo Chávez's Bolivarian Revolution. Venezuela's socialist policies include the nationalization of oil and other key industries, land redistribution, and extensive social welfare programs.

Nepal: Nepal's political landscape is heavily influenced by socialist principles. The Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) and the Maoist Centre are key political players, with socialism at the core of its national agenda.

Nauru: While not a communist state, Nauru follows a socialist-oriented model with a focus on social welfare, including free education, healthcare, and extensive social services.

Nicaragua: The Sandinista government, led by Daniel Ortega, advocates for socialist policies, including education and healthcare expansion, land redistribution, and anti-imperialism. Recently, the country cancelled elections and moved to be an official one party state.

Eritrea: Eritrea (Africa) emphasizes self-reliance, national unity, and state control over key sectors of the economy. Economy can best be described as mixed.

https://www.youngpioneertours.com/socialist-countries/

Activities

1. Find the Communist and Socialist countries of 2026 on a world map.

2. Which Communist countries are in Asia?

3. Make a table with two columns – Communism and Socialism. In dot points list the features of each ideology.

4. What are the similarities between Communism and Socialism?

5. What are the differences?

The Underground Church in China

Life for Christians in the Underground Church in China

For Christians in China today, life in the underground Church remains dangerous and uncertain. Christian persecution in China in severe. While the government allows some religious expression through the state church, many believers reject the state church due to its strict regulations and government oversight. Instead, they turn to the underground Church, where they can worship without censorship. However, any religious practice outside of the State church is illegal.

Christians in the underground Church face constant surveillance by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Authorities routinely raid secret gatherings, arrest pastors, and harass church members. In recent years, China has intensified its crackdown on underground churches, forcing many to disband or go deeper underground to avoid detection.

The risks are real: Christians caught attending underground churches can be detained, fined, or imprisoned. Pastors and church leaders often face the harshest punishments, including lengthy prison sentences and forced labour. Despite these dangers, millions of Chinese believers continue to worship in secret, driven by their faith and their desire for spiritual freedom.

The Underground Church in North Korea

Life Under a Totalitarian Regime

North Korea is widely regarded as the most dangerous country in the world to be a Christian. The Kim dynasty, which has ruled the country since its inception, enforces a state religion of absolute loyalty to the ruling Kim family, which is treated as a divine entity. Under this totalitarian regime, all forms of religion are seen as threats to the government's power, especially Christianity. As a result, Christians in North Korea must practice their faith in absolute secrecy, and the underground Church is the only means of spiritual survival.

Unlike in other countries, where underground churches may at least operate in small groups or hidden homes, North Korean Christians face extreme persecution and isolation. The consequences of being caught practicing Christianity are severe. Simply owning a Bible or mentioning the name of Jesus can result in execution or a life sentence in one of the country's notorious labour camps. These camps are akin to modern-day concentration camps, where prisoners, including Christians, face torture, starvation, and forced labour under brutal conditions.

The underground Church in North Korea operates under layers of secrecy unimaginable to those living in freer societies. Believers must conceal their faith not only from government officials but also from neighbours, co-workers, and even family members, as the regime uses a network of informants to report any suspicious activity. Christians in North Korea cannot gather in public or even in small groups. Many are forced to worship in complete isolation, praying silently and holding onto memorized scriptures to sustain their faith.

The Dangers Faced by Christians in North Korea

The penalties for being discovered as a Christian in North Korea are among the harshest in the world. Christians who are caught are routinely sent to forced labour camps where they endure physical abuse, starvation, and back-breaking labour. In these camps, conditions are so dire that many do not survive. For those who do, the physical and psychological scars remain for life. Entire families can be imprisoned or executed if one member is discovered to be a Christian, as the regime believes in collective punishment to eradicate any influence of religion.

Despite the dangers, an estimated 300,000 Christians continue to live and practice their faith in North Korea. This committed group of believers is forced to live in extreme secrecy, and they rely on the underground Church to sustain their spiritual lives. These underground networks often exist in the form of solitary worship, where individuals keep their faith hidden from even their closest family members.

Survival Tactics of the Underground Church in North Korea

Survival in the North Korean underground Church depends on complete secrecy and extreme caution. Unlike in China or Iran, where small groups of believers can sometimes meet discreetly, North Korean Christians often have no such luxury. Believers may worship alone or with only one or two trusted individuals. If they exist, Bibles are smuggled into the country through covert networks, and owning one is extremely dangerous. Many Christians memorize large portions of scripture to continue meditating on God's Word even if they lose access to a physical Bible.

To survive, Christians in North Korea must develop strategies to avoid detection. One common method is to worship in silent prayers or whispered hymns. Some believers share their faith with others through coded language, using phrases that appear innocuous but have spiritual significance to those who understand the meaning. Believers also use underground networks to communicate with Christians outside of North Korea, often through radio broadcasts or smuggled communications, though these methods are fraught with risk.

The Church in North Korea is deeply isolated from the outside world, but the continued faith of its members show that the Gospel cannot be extinguished, even under the most intense persecution. Underground church members regularly face betrayal by informants, torture during interrogations, and years in labour camps. However, many continue to hold on to their faith, trusting God's promise of eternal life.

Questions

1. List 5 similar issues that Christians face in both China and North Korea.

2. How do Christians survive in these countries?