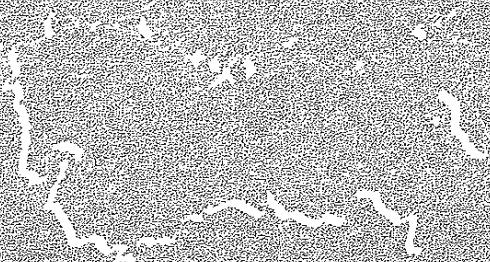


THE REGIONAL STUDIES SERIES

# THE SOVIET UNION

*History · Culture · Geography*

*Michael Kort*



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## CHAPTER 3

### Communist Principles and Practices

Throughout history, philosophers and political thinkers have searched for a way to create a perfect society. In these ideal places, there would be no poverty and everyone would be happy.

#### FORERUNNERS OF COMMUNISM

In the 5th century B.C., the Greek philosopher Plato described his idea of an ideal society. In this society, a specially educated small group would rule and private property would be abolished. All wealth would be held in common. In 16th-century England, the statesman Sir Thomas More described an ideal island he named Utopia. Utopia had common ownership and no poverty. In 16th-century Germany, a religious leader named Thomas Müntzer (MOONT-ser) preached the virtues of a collectivist society to his people.

During the early 1800s, there were two well-known social philosophers in France: Claude Henri Saint-Simon (san-see-MOHN) and Charles Fourier (FUR-ee-AY). Saint-Simon—who fought on the side of the American colonists in their rebellion against England—advocated a planned society. It was to be ruled and managed by a small group of technically trained people. Fourier proposed small communities in which about 1,600 people would live together in communal bliss.

Robert Owen, a Welsh contemporary of Saint-Simon and Fourier, was an industrialist who took matters one step further. In England, he established a factory village called New Lanark based on his ideas. At a time when factory workers—men, women, and children—worked and lived under horrendous conditions, Owen's workers had adequate housing. In New Lanark, children under ten went to school instead of work. The older children worked "only" a 10½-hour day. The adults followed Owen's rules of morality and conduct, which required them to respect the rights of the community as a whole.

Some visions of the perfect society required not only the abolition of private property but also the abolition of the state. This ideology, called

anarchism, had two outstanding advocates: the Frenchman Pierre Proudhon (PROO-dohn), 1809–1865, and the Russian nobleman Mikhail Bakunin (bah-KOO-neen), 1814–1876. The goal of abolishing the state could, in Bakunin's opinion, be reached only after terror and violence had been used to destroy the old order completely.

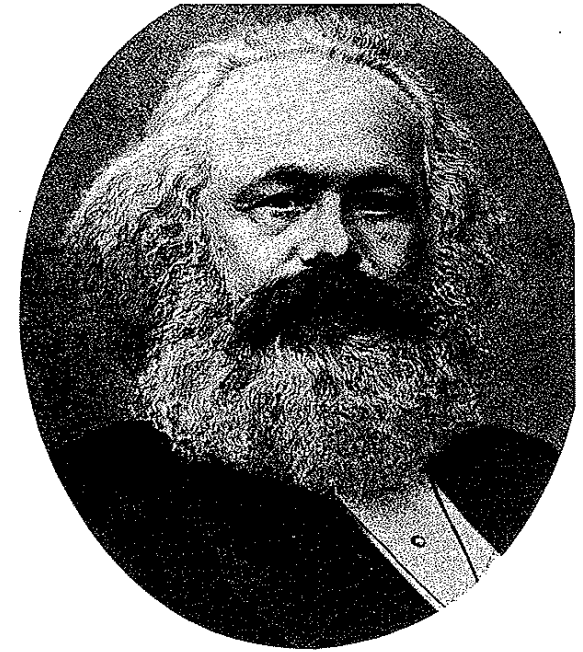
The various new societies that these thinkers envisaged had several common features. These included the abolition of private property and the idea that the interests of the community carried more weight than did the interests of the individual. Another important and interesting feature is that most of these ideal societies were antidemocratic. Plato strongly rejected the democratic system of his native Athens. More, Saint-Simon, Fourier, Owen, Proudhon, and Bakunin all believed that decisions had to be made by an exclusive small group, not by the masses. There were, of course, exceptions like Müntzer, who believed that the masses had to take matters into their own hands.

### THE BASIC PRINCIPLES OF MARXISM

By far the most powerful and influential expression of the desire for an ideal society came from the brilliant, impatient, and angry mind of **Karl Marx** (1818–1883). Marx, born in what today is West Germany, came from a prosperous middle-class family and received an excellent education in law, history, and philosophy. During Marx's lifetime Europe was going through the Industrial Revolution. The miserable conditions under which the workers lived—their long hours and low wages, the number of children who competed with adults for work, and the repeated threats of unemployment—made a lasting impression on Marx.

The *Communist Manifesto*, written by Marx and his lifelong collaborator **Friedrich Engels**, appeared in 1848. It begins with the chilling, much-quoted warning, "A specter is haunting Europe—the specter of communism." It ends with the thunderous battle cry: "Workers of the world, unite! You have nothing to lose but your chains." The manifesto is a bitter denunciation of capitalism and industrialization for twisting and maiming millions of lives and the entire social order of Europe.

Because of his political activities, Marx was forced to leave Germany, France, and then Belgium. In 1849 he settled in England, where he spent the rest of his life. There he wrote *Capital*, a monumental three-volume study. (Actually, the last two volumes were completed after his death by Engels.) In it he attempted to prove that capitalism was doomed and that *communism*—a political and economic system that would guarantee equality, prosperity, and freedom for all—was inevitable. *Capital*, which became the bible of communism, is one of the



*Karl Marx suffered great poverty with his family while in England. He co-authored with Friedrich Engels the Communist Manifesto and Capital to urge workers to overthrow oppression and poverty.*

most important books ever written. Its influence on the social sciences and on the development and spread of communism is immeasurable.

An understanding of Marx's theory requires some explanation of:

- dialectical materialism
- the class struggle
- the theory of surplus value and the crisis of capitalism
- the dictatorship of the proletariat
- the inevitability of communism

**Dialectical Materialism.** Marxism claimed that no human situation lasted forever. The world was always changing. According to Marx, change comes about through a process called **dialectical materialism**. **Materialism** is the idea that all human history—from everyday events to major historical developments—depends completely on what people do. It totally rejects all beliefs that gods or "spirits" of any kind affect what happens to human beings. In other words, the answers to why past events occurred or the solutions to present problems lie in the physical or "material" world of men and women. Events do not depend upon some mystical or "spiritual" world inhabited by gods, goblins, ghosts, or spirits.

**Dialectical** described the pattern of how changes occur. According to Marxism, any human situation—called the "thesis"—inevitably,

simply by existing, creates the seed of its own destruction, or “antithesis.” The antithesis is the opposite of the thesis. As change occurs, there is a period of conflict. The conflict results in the destruction of the old order. This produces a new situation called the “synthesis” in which things are once more in balance. There is no rest, however, for the process begins again.

Marx applied this framework to the study of history. He believed that history could be understood by studying several things. One thing to study was the **mode of production**. This was how people worked and used their technology at a given time to produce what they needed to live. Marx also believed it was important to learn about what he called the class struggle. According to him, this was the unending tension between those who controlled the wealth of a society and those who did not. Marx wrote that the way a society was organized economically (the mode of production or the **substructure**) determined everything else in a society. For example, a society might produce what it needed by hunting, farming, industry, or some combination of these activities. Whatever its economic system, a society developed laws, customs, political principles, and religious beliefs that justified its current state of affairs. Marx called these beliefs and rules the **superstructure**. These beliefs and rules supported and strengthened the position and privileges of the holders of wealth and power. Marxism claimed that the mode of production or substructure—like any human institution—was constantly changing. This process of change was usually slow, but it was there nevertheless. For example, a new invention—a simple hoe perhaps—might gradually cause some members of a society to change from hunting to farming. As more people switched from hunting to farming, the ways of producing things (the substructure) were no longer in agreement with the old beliefs and rules (the superstructure). Thus customs and laws left over from times when hunting was most important might not have given enough credit and power to the growing group of farmers. This imbalance leads to a conflict between the two groups. This Marx called the class conflict. When the conflict reaches the breaking point, Marx claimed there would be a revolution. The old ruling group (the hunters) is overthrown. The new group (the farmers) takes control. It then sets up a new superstructure—laws, customs, and beliefs—that strengthen the farmers’ power. However, there is no stopping or rest. Slowly, unnoticed but inevitably, the process of change continues.

**The Class Struggle.** In their *Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels wrote, “The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class

struggles.” The class struggle they had found in every society was a struggle between those who controlled the wealth of a society and those who did not. Thus, the slaves struggled against their masters, feudal serfs struggled against their feudal lords, and factory workers struggled against their capitalist employers. But always it was the class that controlled the sources of wealth—the slaves, the land, the machines—that had all the power. This class, the ruling class, sets up a political system to protect its own economic power. Governments are created to do the bidding of the ruling class, and laws are passed to protect its special position. To justify a situation that is unfair and oppresses the majority of the people, the ruling class invents moral values and religious beliefs. According to Marx, religion plays a major role in fooling the people into believing that life on earth is unimportant compared to heaven. “Religion,” said Marx, “is the opiate [narcotic] of the masses.”

Marx believed that change from one type of society to another was, by necessity, violent, because no ruling class would give up its position without a fight. Yet every ruling class must lose. Gradually changes in the mode of production strengthen some other groups at the former’s expense. Thus, the slaveholders had to yield to the feudal lords, and the feudal lords to the capitalists. From this Marx and Engels confidently predicted that the downfall of the capitalists was near.

**The Theory of Surplus Value and the Crisis of Capitalism.** In Marx’s time, it was common for a factory worker to work 80 hours a week. Wages were extremely low. Marx insisted that workers were paid far less than they were worth and that this was unfair. For example, the goods that the worker produced in that week might be worth 50 dollars. Yet the weekly wage of the worker would be no more than 10 dollars. The difference between these two values—in this case 40 dollars—was what Marx called **surplus value**. The capitalist who owned the factory pocketed this difference and regarded it as rightful profit. To Marx that amounted to stealing the surplus value from the workers. It left the workers miserably poor while the capitalists grew rich.

The theft, said Marx, was a two-edged sword. Because the workers were paid for less than the value they produced, they could not buy enough goods to keep all the capitalists in business. This led to increasing competition among the capitalists. To outsell his competitors, the capitalist will cut his prices, often by introducing machines to replace workers, or cut his workers’ wages. But this allows the workers to buy even less. As the capitalists’ profits fall, competition gets fiercer. Eventually, the merciless struggle reduces the number of capitalists, as the losers go bankrupt and economic crises become more severe.

## CASE INQUIRY:

### *The Communist Manifesto*

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels were relatively unknown in 1848 when they issued their famous call to revolution, *The Communist Manifesto*. In these final paragraphs they repeat their major themes:

... the theory of the Communists may be summed up in the single sentence: Abolition of private property. . . .

Communism deprives no man of the power to appropriate the products of society; all that it does is to deprive him of the power to subjugate the labor of others by means of such appropriation. . . .

We have seen . . . that the first step in the revolution by the working class is to raise the proletariat to the position of ruling class. . . .

The proletariat will use its political supremacy to wrest by degrees all capital from the bourgeoisie; to centralize all instruments of production in the hands of the State, i.e., of the proletariat organized as the ruling class; and to increase the total of productive forces as rapidly as possible. . . .

The Communists disdain to conceal their view and aims. They openly declare that their ends can be attained only by the forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions. Let the ruling classes tremble at a Communist revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win.

Workers of all countries, unite!

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Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, New York: Penguin Books, Inc., 1986, pp. 96, 99, 104, 120–121.

1. According to the manifesto, what is the main goal of communism?
2. What is the first step in the revolutionary process?
3. Who are the exploiters, according to Marx and Engels?
4. Why do you think this document was so powerful?

**The Dictatorship of the Proletariat.** The working class, which Marx called the proletariat, was exploited by the capitalists. But it was also gaining valuable experience. In the factories, many people had to cooperate in order to make a product. The workers were learning that their cooperation, not the activities of the capitalist, was the reason for society's wealth. Eventually, led by a group Marx called **Communists**, the working class would unite and overthrow the tiny capitalist minority.

Immediately after their revolution, the victorious workers would control the **means of production**—the factories, railroads, mines, and farms. Then private property would be abolished. If the capitalists fought back, the workers would use their overwhelming numbers to crush them. The new society, the dictatorship of the proletariat, would own the means of production and it would not exploit the workers.

Marx did not consider the dictatorship of the proletariat to be oppressive in the traditional sense. It would crush a small minority—the former oppressors—but not hurt the majority of the people. When the dictatorship of the proletariat had finished its job and destroyed the capitalists once and for all, it would somehow dissolve. Then what Marx called the *era of socialism* would arrive. Marx said very little about how the dictatorship of the proletariat would function or dissolve.

Socialism was the first stage of Marx's dream society, **communism**. Under socialism, there would still be some remnants of the old order, such as old habits of behavior and inefficient methods of organization. Therefore some kind of state would be needed to organize and to run things. In this state, people were to be paid according to the value of their labor. As the old ways of doing things disappeared, the socialist state would "wither away," said Marx. After that, wealth would be produced in great plenty. In this society, the amount of money or property one has would not depend on one's job. Rather, society would be run according to the principle: "From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs." Communism would have arrived. Social classes would cease to exist, as all people would be equal in a communist society. Crime, vice, and all other evils would disappear, since they are products of the old class society. There would, in fact, be no need to work in order to survive. Nonetheless, people would work, Marx predicted, because they derived pure pleasure from producing and creating.

**The Inevitability of Communism.** Marx claimed that his analysis with its promise of well-being was based on a scientific study of history. He and Engels had not simply complained that things were bad. They had carefully examined the Western civilization, tracing its development and progress. Their predictions reflected that study. Marx and Engels

criticized other socialists for basing socialism on hopes rather than on reality. Socialism could not have been achieved before the 19th century, Marx and Engels pointed out. In earlier times, industry, essential for a universal high standard of living, had not existed. Limited wealth in pre-industrial times forced people to compete for whatever wealth there was. In the process, the strong inevitably oppressed the weak. Fortunately, said Marx and Engels, history had reached a point where socialism (followed by communism) was inevitable. In 1848 they proclaimed that capitalism was haunted by the “specter of communism.” Both men spent the rest of their lives waiting for its arrival.

**Leninism: The Application of Marxist Theory.** The first Marxist who had the opportunity to try out the master’s ideas was Vladimir Ilich Ulyanov (ool-YAN-uv), a Russian from a cultured, middle-class family. Despite his rather conservative upbringing, he was touched by revolutionary currents early in life. In 1887, when Vladimir was just 17, his brother was executed for participating in a plot to assassinate the czar. Vladimir himself got into trouble as a university student for his role in student protests. By his mid-twenties, he was a committed revolutionary, known to his comrades in the movement—as he is now known to history—by his revolutionary alias Lenin.

A number of differences exist between the Marxism of Karl Marx and the Marxism of Lenin, later known as **Leninism**. Leninism combined elements of Marxism with elements of Russia’s revolutionary tradition. For example, Marx believed that the factory workers themselves would become revolutionaries and eventually take action to overthrow their oppressors. Lenin had much less faith in the workers’ ability to act alone. He believed a group of professional revolutionaries functioning as a centralized political party would have to show the workers the way. Without such guidance, said Lenin, the workers would be satisfied with better wages and working conditions, and thereby ensure the continuation of capitalism. Lenin’s plan for a revolutionary party stressed that the party would control the workers, and a small central committee would control the party. His plan met with some opposition. Many of Lenin’s fellow Marxists feared that his party—if it ever came to power—would be as oppressive and dictatorial as the czarist regime. Lenin agreed with Marx that every society had to pass through a capitalist phase. Marx believed that capitalism would have to collapse before a society could pass on to the next stage. But Lenin felt that the next stage could be reached sooner if the proletariat seized power in Russia and if the revolution quickly led to other socialist revolutions in western Europe. In Chapter 4 you will learn how Lenin and his party seized power in Russia.



*Lenin addressing a May Day rally in 1918.*

**Stalinism: Marxism Forges a New Society.** Lenin combined Marxism with the Russian revolutionary tradition. Joseph Stalin (STAH-leen), who succeeded Lenin as head of the Party, added the governing methods of Ivan the Terrible. In Chapter 4 you will learn about the Soviet Union under Stalin. Stalin’s real name was Dzhugashvili (dzhoo-gah-SHVEE-lee); the name *Stalin* was derived from the Russian word for steel, *stal*. He was not an ethnic Russian. He was a Georgian, but he tried to make himself as Russian as possible. Stalin was born into poverty and endured a brutal childhood. From defiance, he drifted into revolutionary activity. As a member of Lenin’s Bolshevik party, Stalin helped to raise funds by engaging in criminal activities, such as bank robberies. Lenin approved but some of the revolutionaries did not. They distrusted Stalin because they thought he was two-faced and mean. Their fears proved to be justified. Once Stalin assumed power, he employed unbelievably brutal methods. Millions of lives were sacrificed and his methods have been compared to those of Ivan the Terrible and Peter the Great. The degree of violence that Stalin brought to Marxist government would have shocked Marx, and probably even Lenin.

Stalin modified Marxism in other ways as well. Communist principles and practices were increasingly merged with the traditions and methods of old Russia. He insisted that Russia could build socialism on its own, without Communist revolutions elsewhere, which other Marxists considered essential. Furthermore, Stalin refused to accept Marx’s view that the state would wither away. While communism was being built, he insisted, the state would have to grow stronger. Stalin kept proclaiming that he was the faithful interpreter of Marx and Lenin. Many historians think Stalin’s state had more in common with Russia’s age-old tradition of autocracy than with Marxist theory. In Chapter 4 we can see how this happened by turning to the history of Russia since 1917, the year the Marxist Vladimir Ilich Lenin led his small band of Bolsheviks to power.



## Chapter 3: CHECKUP

### REVIEWING THE CHAPTER

#### I. Building Your Vocabulary

In your notebook, write the correct term from the list below that best completes each statement. (There are two extra words in the list.)

surplus value      socialism      Robert Owen      Utopia  
anarchism      *Capital*      Ulyanov

1. The ideal community envisioned by the 16th-century English statesman Sir Thomas More was called \_\_\_\_ (1) \_\_\_\_.
2. \_\_\_\_ (2) \_\_\_\_, a British industrialist, founded a factory village in which children and adults followed his rules of work, morality, and conduct.
3. Some people believed the perfect society could only be achieved through \_\_\_\_ (3) \_\_\_\_, the abolition of the state.
4. Karl Marx expounded his theories of communism in a monumental three-volume work entitled \_\_\_\_ (4) \_\_\_\_.
5. The difference between the worth of what a worker produces and his or her weekly wage is known as \_\_\_\_ (5) \_\_\_\_.

#### II. Understanding the Facts

In your notebook, write the letter of the word or phrase that best completes or answers each of the following.

1. In *The Republic*, Plato described an ideal society for his native  
a. France   b. Russia   c. Greece
2. The *proletariat* refers to  
a. the workers   b. the nobles   c. the peasants
3. Karl Marx came from  
a. an English working-class background   b. a prosperous German family   c. a group of Russian revolutionaries
4. According to Marx and Engels, the class struggle  
a. existed throughout history   b. was a product of the Industrial Revolution   c. was the fault of the czars
5. Marx believed that  
a. when the proletariat gained control, the workers would not be exploited   b. a small group of professional leaders should lead the masses   c. socialism would be established by peaceful means

6. Religion, according to Marx,  
a. strengthened the government   b. encouraged socialist ideals  
c. fooled the people into accepting their lot
7. The first stage of Marx's dream society was  
a. the dictatorship of the proletariat   b. the crisis of capitalism  
c. the era of socialism
8. Marx and Engels believed that when communism finally arrived  
a. there would be only two social classes   b. no one would work  
c. crime, vice, and all other evils of society would disappear
9. Lenin revised Marxist principles by  
a. introducing the idea of professionally trained leaders   b. denouncing the class struggle principle   c. renouncing the use of violence
10. Stalin modified Marxism by  
a. building an autocratic government   b. advocating peaceful methods   c. insisting on worldwide revolution

### THINKING IT THROUGH

1. Charles Fourier and Robert Owen each criticized economic injustices. Tell how each proposed to find solutions to the plight of workers. Why do you think their programs did not last?
2. Describe similarities and differences between socialism and communism.
3. What was the appeal of Marxism in the later 19th century? How did it reflect the changes brought about by the Industrial Revolution?
4. In the photograph below, why do you think these 19th-century Russian peasants are plowing without either horses or oxen?

