

COMMUNISM

THE STORY OF THE IDEA AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION

JAMES R. OZINGA



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PREFACE

Communism is a complicated subject, involving many different academic fields and geographical areas. A book that covers the whole range of material from philosophy, history, comparative political systems, economics, international relations, futurism, and even theology runs the risk of oversimplification as well as leaving out what specialists feel are significant items.

Alternatives to the one-author, total-coverage approach are many books on narrow subjects, or collections of essays written by many different authors from the perspectives of their specialties. What is gained by the multi-authored book or by several books, however, is diminished considerably by overlaps, gaps, and differences in the authors' styles and emphases. In a book such as this one, despite the risks, all of the presented material is filtered through only one mind and written in a single style so that the entire recent history of communism emerges as a single, unfolding story with many different dimensions.

Moreover, the book is written in such a way that anyone with an interest in learning about communism should be able to do so without extensive earlier preparation. The book is intended for college-age men and women with no specific background in the subject and seeks to communicate a story to those who do not already know it but wish to learn. To assist that communication, chapters are divided into sections, summaries are provided after each

section, and an Afterword is provided at the end of each chapter to make it easier to follow transitions from one level to the next. Discussion questions occur after each chapter. In addition, difficult words or ideas that are explained in the glossary are shown in boldface print in the text when they first appear. Finally, the index is as thorough as careful attention can make it. Everything possible has been done to facilitate communication. This book is not a test of superior intellectual skill, but a common-sense attempt to teach a complicated subject to as many people as possible.

Numerous people have helped me in my quest for simultaneous accuracy and simplicity. Among them were the Prentice-Hall reviewers: Harvey Fireside; Vincent E. McHale, Department of Political Science, Case Western Reserve University; Dr. David W. Dent, Department of Political Science, Towson State University; Dr. Richard Hofstetter; Dr. David M. Wood, Department of Political Science, University of Missouri-Columbia.

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James R. Ozinga

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INTRODUCTION

The term *communism* frightens people. Instead of connoting community sharing and happy cooperation, the word suggests terrorism, gulags, and Soviet activities designed to embarrass or damage the Western world. For a great many Americans, communism has come to mean the *other* side, particularly after the onset of the cold war between the USSR and the United States. When *communist* is used to describe someone in the United States, it is usually a strongly negative commentary on that person's views and implies that the person is un-American in some way.

A negative response to communism, however, is by no means the only reaction. The idea of communism has had a long history—much of it before Karl Marx in the nineteenth century—and sometimes the response to the idea was positive. For example, prehistoric peoples seemed to live communistically—social sharing was a dominant characteristic of their simpler societies. In addition, about four hundred years before Christ, Plato speculated in *The Republic* that communism among his philosopher kings and queens would help protect them against the corruptive influences of money and greed and help them rule for the good of the whole. In the sixteenth century, Sir Thomas More's fictional account of *Utopia* had the island people happily living in communism, suggesting once again that concern for the social whole and community sharing was a higher way of

life than the materialism and fractious politics of his own day in England and Europe.

The contrast of the idyllic, sharing community with the competitive, acquisitive character of everyday society, has long made communism appear to be a desirable if nearly impossible goal that has appealed to a great many people. The popularity of utopian novels testified to that popular appeal.¹ Communism to many people became synonymous with idyllic living—a sort of heaven on earth that one can dream about even if it isn't very realistic or practical—but representing, nonetheless, a goal towards which societies could aspire. People who believed that history constantly and gradually progresses from lower to higher forms of social organization found it simple to imagine a communistic future that would naturally emerge from history's evolving.

As a result, when the Bolsheviks took control of Russia in 1917 and for the first time established a state dedicated to the ideals of communism, many *Western* intellectuals felt strongly that the new experiments in Russia were the progressive wave of the future. Some travelled to Russia and saw both what they wanted to see and what they were intended to see. These very positive views of the Soviet Union, detailed in Paul Hollander's *Political Pilgrims*,² disintegrated just before World War II, only to be replaced in the 1960s and early 1970s by admiration for Mao's China or Castro's Cuba.

A neutral attitude towards communism is possible as well. This view, which neither accepts nor rejects communism, is indifferent to the ideological basis of another society, just as you might ignore a neighbor's different religion. The important thing about a neighbor, in your view, would be how he or she behaves in your relationship regardless of the religious basis underlying this behavior. Similarly, many people view the USSR, China, or other communist states as potential trading partners wherein the important thing is not the ideology, but financial stability and size of the market.

However, the negative view of communism has been more common in history because attempts to establish some form of communism have normally involved attacks on the existing political and economic culture. For examples, think of the German peasant revolts in 1524–1525 and Gerrard Winstanley's small group of Diggers or True Levellers in the middle of England's chaotic seventeenth century, which the establishments of those times saw as serious challenges to their power. A modern anticommunist perspective similarly views socialism or communism as a threat to the preferred, established way of life. Because in modern times the ideology has the power of a state behind it, it is often difficult for people to distinguish between the two—whether, for example, one's hostility is directed against Russia as a world power, against its alleged communism, or both.

When either pro- or anticommunist beliefs become strongly held, it is difficult to discuss the matter rationally. People put ideological blinders on

and see what they wish to see and remember what supports their side of the issue. Opposing arguments are ridiculed rather than listened to, and supporting views are sought to the point where even questions can become suspect.

Objectivity under these circumstances is understandably difficult, a bit rare, and often taken by the already convinced as weakness. A sympathy expressed for *some* aspects of communism is often taken as support for the whole; conversely a preference for an Adam Smith sort of consumer sovereignty in the market, rather than central economic planning, is imagined to be an apology for the whole of capitalism. Only two sides seem possible. In reality, however, *there aren't just two sides—the pro and the con*. It is quite possible to seek simply to understand without the constant need to condemn or support either “side.”

As we approach the twenty-first century it seems increasingly obvious that the “other side” and the “we versus them” attitudes currently held by too many influential people are positions that stand in the way of necessary solutions to global problems. The reduction of the shrillness of ideological combat through a quiet understanding of *both* sides may be labelled naive by ideologues, but it is the necessary prerequisite for a life of greater peace and harmony among different peoples in the world our children and grandchildren will inherit.

NOTES

1. See for example James Harrington's *Oceana*, Etienne Cabet's *Journey to Icaria*, and Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward* and *Equality*. Almost any library would have copies. In addition an excellent source of information on utopia-making throughout history is Frank and Fritzie Manuel, *Utopian Thought in the Western World* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979).

2. Paul Hollander, *Political Pilgrims: Travels of Western Intellectuals to the Soviet Union, China, and Cuba, 1928–1978* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981).

CHAPTER ONE

THE BACKGROUND OF MARXISM

The story of contemporary communism begins with Karl Marx (1818–1883), whose youth and early adulthood were spent in the Germanic area during the first half of the nineteenth century. Three factors, which Marx would eventually pull together as he developed intellectually, dominated the intellectual climate of the time: the excitement and economic changes caused by the Industrial Revolution; French socialism, which had grown out of the frustrations of an incomplete French Revolution; and the philosophy known as Hegelianism.

Karl Marx grew up in an area exposed to each of these factors. His birthplace, Trier (Treves), was a city of about twelve thousand people located in the Moselle valley. The Industrial Revolution was moving in an eastward direction from Great Britain where it had begun, and Trier's location in the western or Rhineland portion of the still rather medieval Germanic area caused it to feel the impact of economic change well before Berlin and Prussia did. Consequently, impulses toward industrialization and modernization were experienced more strongly there than in the rest of Germany. In addition, Trier's location made it open to French influences in an interesting way. In 1818, when Marx was born, Trier was some twenty miles from the French border, although the city had been a part of France from 1794 to 1814. Thus, Trier was more deeply affected by the

French Revolution and, later, by French socialism than its German location in 1818 would indicate. Furthermore, the University of Berlin, which Marx began attending in 1836, had been deeply influenced by the historical and philosophical teaching of Professor Georg W. F. Hegel, who had died just five years earlier. Marx's interest in history and philosophy made it impossible for him to avoid the Hegelian philosophy and the interpretations of Hegel by his colleagues and friends.

Because comprehending these three major influences will make it easier to understand the gradual development of Marx's ideas and to grasp the system of thought known as Marxism, let us examine each of them in more detail.

INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

The Industrial Revolution began in Britain around 1780. The date is rather arbitrary and the word *revolution* is a bit exaggerated, for it did not happen in a brief, tumultuous fashion, but emerged over time as water power phased into steam power, and decentralized or cottage industries evolved into the factory system.

These changes occurred in Britain because several elements were present there at the same time. Energy from coal was available from deeper seams because of the newly improved steam engines which could pump water out of the coal mines as well as drive machinery in factories. Patent laws deliberately encouraged a climate of inventiveness by ensuring rich financial rewards and this resulted in a technological explosion as innovations in the textile industry spread into other areas. Steam power for land transportation led to railroads, which in turn led to the development and use of stronger metals like iron and steel. Capitalized agriculture or farming to provide a sellable surplus was already very visible, most notably in wool production. This helped the textile industry expand and, as subsistence agriculture declined, created a supply of surplus laborers. The worldwide British empire provided both a source of raw materials and a market where finished products could be sold with little competition. The fact that Britain was an island made international transportation easier, while ample rivers permitted an easy internal movement of goods. Sufficient money was available for investments (risk capital). All these essential ingredients had come together around 1780 to bring about the dramatic change in the British economy.

The Industrial Revolution brought about a tremendous alteration in the life-style of most British families. A great many more goods, which would eventually raise the standard of living for all of the population, were being produced by the new industries. However, as the novels of Charles Dickens revealed, in the early 1800s the working **class** did not seem to

benefit at all. The workers' cottages were in the lowest, dampest, and worst sections of the city, and each house usually had several families living in one or two rooms. Although disease was rampant, medical care was expensive and often not sought. Workers and their families may not have been worse off than they had been before in the rural areas, but in the countryside their poverty, their wastes, and their diseases were scattered instead of concentrated. In the rural areas they may not have had more income or more food but they did see the light of day, work outdoors, and hedge against hard times by tilling a small garden. In the cities the rhythms were not the seasons and the rising and setting of the sun, but the needs of machines and the factory foreman. The factory shift started and ended in darkness, interior ventilation was extremely poor, and women and children were often preferred by employers because they could be paid even less than the pittance paid to males. The lives of entire families centered around the factory from very early in the morning until evening. Breaks in the day for meals or any other purpose were very grudgingly given. Those who complained were fired. Hunger and malnutrition were common. And this described the good times.

The bad times were the eras of industrial crises when people lost their jobs. This brought about increased pauperization or an often futile return to the countryside where anticipated relief could not be obtained because capitalized agriculture and the Enclosure Acts had reduced available land. Bad times caused banditry, which resulted in prison sentences; begging; prostitution; the work farm; abandoned children; and overpopulated poorhouses.¹ The workers were almost entirely uneducated and illiterate. They didn't have the right to vote, and, if they tried to strike, they were soon forced to join other comrades in the terrible prisons. Life in the poorly lit, crowded, and seldom policed working-class sections of the city was barely endurable.

Usually over half of a worker's income went to purchase food. Life expectancy was very low. In the rural areas, on average the wealthy lived until they were fifty-two years old, while the poor averaged only thirty-eight years. In nineteenth-century Manchester, one of the industrial cities, things were worse: on average the wealthy lived thirty-eight years whereas the workers had a life expectancy of seventeen years!² Those who survived to age six could begin working in the factory, and life in the factory was the only hope of continuing survival.

The plight of the working class had three decisive consequences, none of which is entirely exclusive of the others. The first was a developing humanitarian concern with the condition of the working class that sought to broaden the existing laws designed to help the poor in order to benefit the new **proletariat** (industrial working class). England had had laws that provided some relief for the poor since the time of Elizabeth I in the 1500s, but they referred more to earlier, rural times. The desire to change this—

to help the industrial working poor—gradually found expression in acts passed by Parliament in 1802, 1819, 1825, and 1833. The most important of these was the Factory Act of 1833.

This act provided that children under nine were no longer to be employed in the factories and that children between the ages of nine and thirteen could work no more than forty-eight hours per week and must receive two hours of schooling per day. Children between the ages of thirteen and eighteen were prohibited from working more than sixty-eight hours per week.³ The act applied only to the large textile industries, and it was poorly implemented and enforced. Although it would take subsequent laws and the passage of decades before real reform was clearly visible, this legislation was an advance at a time when any step, however small, was an incredible improvement.

A second consequence of the workers' conditions was the beginnings of organized union activity. Initially prohibited as a result of fears of worker unrest encouraged by the French Revolution, labor unions became legal in 1825. But the law that gave them life was not intended to give them effective life. When unions moved beyond the strictly local level, they met strong opposition. For example, an attempt was made in 1830 to bring all the small unions together into one large Grand National Consolidated Trades Union. When workers formed subunits of this new union, they were promptly arrested and sentenced to seven years in prison. The Grand National quickly dissolved.⁴ In 1838, the labor struggle became political in the form of the Chartist movement, so-called because it presented its demands by means of a charter. Its goals were, among other things, universal suffrage, the secret ballot, and the payment of members of Parliament so that those who weren't wealthy could run for office. These mild demands appeared revolutionary at that time. Over a million signatures were gathered in support of the Charter, and this success helped bring about intense opposition from established interests. Due to this pressure, by 1848 the movement was no longer an active force for change.

A third consequence of the plight of the working class was the development of British socialism. One of the people behind the Grand National movement was Robert Owen, a factory owner concerned about his own workers. As a socialist, Owen improved conditions for his own laborers by improving conditions within his factories, providing decent housing, and by insisting on education for the children of his workers. Owen wanted his ideas to become the model for British industry but he had great difficulty in getting the necessary legislation passed by successive parliaments. His frustrations made him more distinctly socialist; however, Owen's socialism was reformist or nonrevolutionary. He wanted to achieve socialism by the gradual passage and enforcement of new laws—by *using* the government rather than by *overthrowing* it. This reformism would characterize British socialism throughout the nineteenth century, but it *was* socialism—

workers through their **cooperatives** would become the joint owners of the production process.

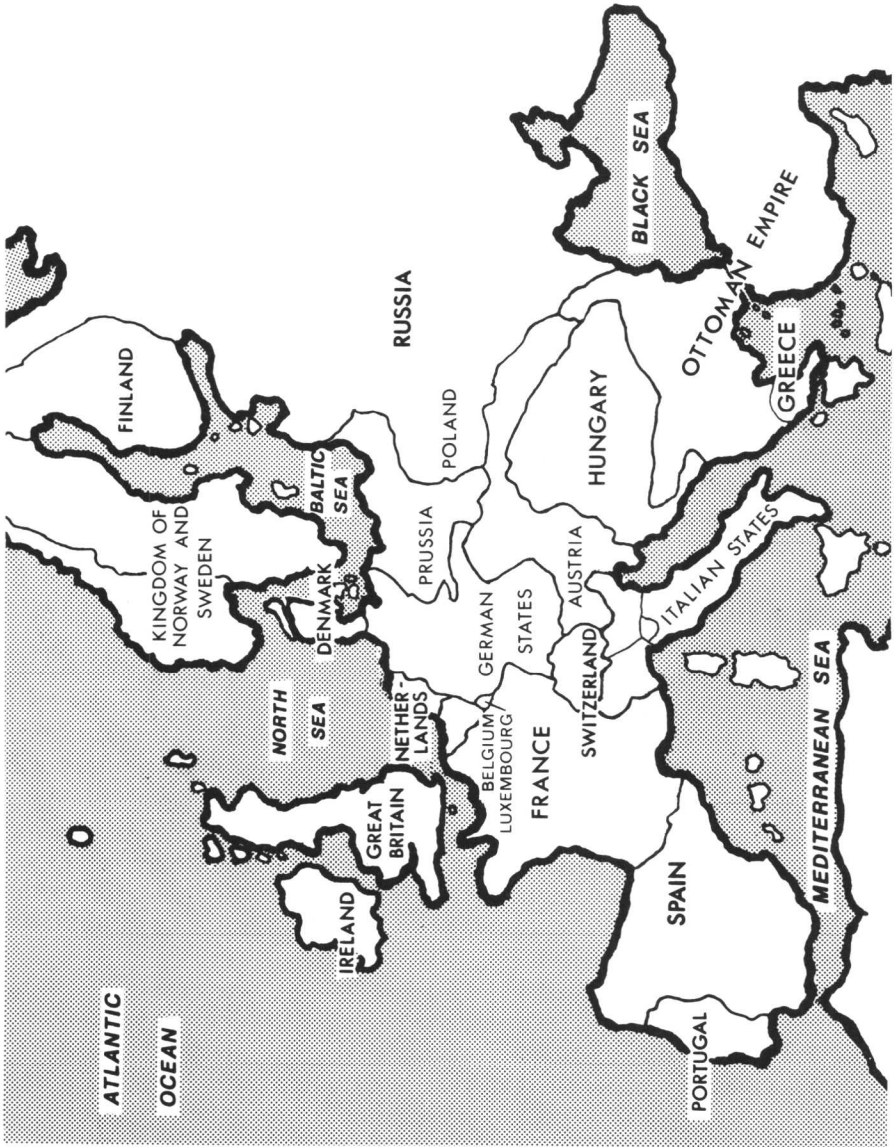
The 1820s and 1830s also saw a more theoretical socialism emerge from a group called the *Ricardian* socialists. This group of economists, following David Ricardo's idea that wealth was created by labor, argued that, since the workers created the values of the commodities they produced, the workers should get all the rewards, including the profits. That is, because workers produced the wealth, that wealth belonged to them rather than to the owners of the factories. This sort of thinking enjoyed a brief heyday and much Owenite thinking blended with that of the Ricardian socialists, but it made little impression on the developing capitalist system.

The Industrial Revolution—centralized factories, urban concentrations, rational and efficient new ways of organizing the productive system, and the push toward continuing, creative investments—spread from England to Belgium and France in the early nineteenth century and soon penetrated the Germanic areas from the west. Most intellectuals saw the new industrial methods as a beneficial and progressive wave of the future, while politicians and monarchs sensed a means of simultaneously increasing both their country's military strength and its general economic health. In the path of that seemingly irresistible movement from west to east lay the Rhineland where Karl Marx was born.

For an area like the Germanic, still quite medieval, the biggest barriers to the new economics were the tariff and tax laws that each little community maintained. Growth in trade and real economies of scale were made nearly impossible by these laws. But already in 1833, when Karl Marx was just fifteen years old, the *Zollverein*, or Customs Union, had been established, which reduced these parochial impediments in large parts of the Germanic area. By 1852, this Customs Union had spread over most of the country. In other words, before the area was politically unified (1871), an economic unity was created by the needs of industrial capitalism to have raw materials, labor, and markets unfettered by local taxes or tariffs that had been in place since the Middle Ages. Marx grew up in the midst of these changes.

Summary

The Industrial Revolution was profoundly influential because as new, central factory methods of production were introduced, great changes were brought about in the way people lived their lives. Broadly speaking, the major change was from a rural, agrarian to an urban, industrial way of life. In the process, concentrated poverty among the working classes (proletariat) became a social problem of some magnitude, in part because this pauperization occurred in a context of vastly improved **commodity production**. The obvious dilemma of the working class created at least three attempted solutions: (1) parliamentary concern expressed in the Factory



MAP 1 Western Europe 1850