

Communism

Introduction

System of political and economic organization in which property is owned by the state or community and all citizens share in the common wealth, more or less according to their need.

Many small communist communities have existed at one time or another, most of them on a religious basis, generally under the inspiration of a literal interpretation of Scripture. The “[utopian](#)” [socialists](#) of the 19th century also founded communities, though they replaced the religious emphasis with a rational and philanthropic idealism. Best known among them were Robert Owen, who founded New Harmony in Indiana (1825), and Charles Fourier, whose disciples organized other settlements in the United States such as Brook Farm (1841–47). In 1848 the word communism acquired a new meaning when it was used as identical with socialism by [Karl Marx](#) and [Friedrich Engels](#) in their famous *Communist Manifesto*. They, and later their followers, used the term to mean a late stage of socialism in which goods would become so abundant that they would be distributed on the basis of need rather than of endeavour. The [Bolshevik](#) wing of the Russian Social-Democratic Workers' Party, which took power in Russia in 1917, adopted the name All-[Russian Communist Party](#) in 1918, and some of its allied parties in other countries also adopted the term Communist. Consequently, the [Soviet Union](#) and other states that were governed by Soviet-type parties were commonly referred to as “Communist” and their official doctrines were called “Communism,” although in none of these countries had a communist society fully been established. The word communism is also applied to the doctrines of Communist parties operating within states where they are not in power.

The origins of Soviet communism

Communism as it had evolved by 1917 was an amalgam of 19th-century European [Marxism](#), indigenous Russian revolutionary tradition, and the organizational and [revolutionary ideas](#) of the Bolshevik leader [Lenin](#). Marxism held that history was propelled by [class struggles](#). [Social classes](#) were determined by their relationship to the means of production; feudal society, with its lords and vassals, had been succeeded in western Europe by bourgeois society with its capitalists and workers. But bourgeois society, according to Marxism, contained within itself the seeds of its own destruction: the number of capitalists would diminish, while the ranks of the impoverished proletariat would grow until finally there would be a breakdown and a Socialist [revolution](#) in which the overwhelming majority, the proletariat, would dispossess the small minority of capitalist exploiters.

Marxism had been known and studied in Russia for at least 30 years before Lenin took it up at the end of the 19th century. The first intellectual leader of the Russian Marxists was [G.V. Plekhanov](#). Implicit in the teachings of Plekhanov was an acceptance of the fact that Russia had a long way to go before it would reach the stage at which a proletarian revolution could occur, and

a preliminary stage would inevitably be a bourgeois democratic regime that would replace the autocratic system of Tsarism.

Plekhanov, like most of the early Russian Marxist leaders, had been reared in the traditional Russian revolutionary movement broadly known as [Populism](#), a basic tenet of which was that the social revolution must be the work of the people themselves, and the task of the revolutionaries was only to prepare them for it. But there were more impatient elements within the movement, and it was under their influence that a group called "[People's Will](#)" broke off from the Populist organization "[Land and Freedom](#)" in 1879. Both groups were characterized by strict discipline and highly conspiratorial organization; "People's Will," however, refused to share the Populist aversion to political action, and in 1881 some of its members succeeded in assassinating Tsar Alexander II.

During the period of reaction and repression that followed, revolutionary activity virtually came to an end. By the time Lenin emerged into revolutionary life in Kazan at the age of 17, small revolutionary circles were beginning to form again. Lenin was a revolutionary in the Russian tradition for some time before he was converted to Marxism (through the study of the works of Marx) before he was yet 19. From the doctrines of the Populists, notably P.N. Tkachev, he drew the idea of a strictly disciplined, conspiratorial organization of full-time revolutionaries who would work among important sections of the population to win support for the seizure of power when the moment was ripe; this revolutionary organization would take over the state and use it to introduce Socialism. Lenin added two Marxist elements that were totally absent in Populist theory: the notion of the class struggle and the acceptance of the need for Russia to pass through a stage of capitalism.

Lenin's most distinctive contributions to Communist theory as formulated in [What Is To Be Done?](#) (1902) and the articles that preceded it were, first, that the workers have no revolutionary consciousness and that their spontaneous actions will lead only to "trade union" demands and not to revolution; second, the corollary that revolutionary consciousness must be brought to them from outside by their intellectual leaders; and third, the conviction that the party must consist of full-time, disciplined, centrally directed professionals, capable of acting as one man.

Lenin's tactics led in 1903 to a split in the [Russian Social-Democratic Workers' Party](#). With his left-wing faction, called the Bolsheviks, he strove to build a disciplined party and to outwit and discredit his [Social-Democratic](#) opponents. After the collapse of tsarism in February 1917, he pursued a policy of radical opposition to the Socialists and Liberals who had come to power in the provisional government, and he eventually succeeded in seizing power in October 1917. Thereafter he eliminated both the opposition of other parties and his critics among the Bolsheviks, so that by the 10th party congress in March 1921 the Bolsheviks (or Communists) had become a monolithic, disciplined party controlling all aspects of Russian life. It was this machine that [Stalin](#) inherited when he became general secretary of the party in 1922.

The [Third International](#)

The victory of the Bolsheviks in Russia gave a new impetus to the more extreme left wings of the Socialist parties in Europe. Lenin's relations with the European Socialist parties had been hostile even before World War I. During the war he had endeavoured to assert his influence over the dissident left wings of the Socialist parties of the belligerent powers, and at two conferences in Switzerland, in 1915 and in 1916, he had rallied these dissident groups to a policy of radical opposition to the war efforts of their governments and to an effort to turn the war into a civil war. He had already decided by 1914 that, after the war, a Third International must be formed to take the place of the [Second International](#) of Socialist parties, which had failed to oppose the war despite its strong antiwar tradition. By 1919, when the new Soviet regime in Russia was fighting for its survival, the intervention on the anti-Soviet side by Britain, France, and the U.S. was a powerful and practical argument to be used by Soviet Russia in its appeals for revolution in capitalist countries. It early became clear the Third International would reflect the influence of Soviet Russia and that it was likely to become subordinate to Soviet aims and needs.

Lenin's 21 conditions

The Third International, or Comintern, had its first congress in 1919. This gathering of a very few parties in Moscow was more symbolic than real; the main structure of the new International was not hammered out until the second congress in July 1920, also in Moscow. Hopes of world revolution ran high; the prestige of the new Soviet state was in the ascendant, and the resolutions adopted at this congress reflected in the fullest possible way Lenin's idea of what a [Communist party](#) should be. It was to be the “main instrument for the liberation of the working class,” highly centralized and disciplined according to the formula of “democratic centralism” on which the Bolshevik Party had been founded. Twenty-one conditions were laid down by the congress as prerequisites for parties affiliating with the Comintern. These conditions were designed to ensure a complete break with the older Social Democratic parties from which the Communist parties were splitting off. The new parties were required to adopt the name Communist in their title, to urge open and persistent warfare against reformist Social Democracy and the Second International, to maintain a centralized and disciplined party press, to conduct periodic purges of their ranks, and to carry on continuous and systematic propaganda in the army and among the workers and peasants. Each constituent party was to support in every possible way the struggle of “every Soviet republic” against counterrevolution. Decisions of the Comintern and of its executive committee were to be binding on all members, and the breach of any of these conditions was to be ground for expelling individual members from their parties—a provision that in future years was to be interpreted very broadly.

The New Economic Policy

The prestige of Soviet Russia, the rigid discipline imposed by the 21 conditions, and certain other factors ensured the predominance of Russian control and Russian interests over the Comintern. Though the predominance increased during Stalin's time, it was clearly evident while Lenin was still alive. At the third world congress in June and July 1921, the Comintern was

confronted by Lenin with his [New Economic Policy](#)—a program encouraging small private enterprise, which several months earlier he had put into effect inside Russia. Lenin wanted a temporary halt to the revolutionary upsurge in Europe to give him time to develop stable trade relations with capitalist countries, to whom the Soviet state was preparing to grant trading and industrial concessions. Comintern members were required to support this policy, and the expulsion of the German Communist leader Paul Levi after the failure of a Communist uprising in Germany in March 1921 showed how determined the leaders of the Comintern were to put down inconvenient left-wing “adventures.” It was with the requirements of the New Economic Policy in mind that the Comintern executive committee in December 1921 launched the turnaround policy of the United Front and of trade union unity. This policy of rapprochement with Socialists and liberals was likewise designed to gain support for Lenin's policy of consolidation at home by appealing to a broader spectrum of opinion in the capitalist countries.

Stalinism

Socialism in one country

Lenin's successor, Joseph Stalin, always claimed to be his faithful follower, and this was to some extent true. Stalin's doctrine that Socialism could be constructed in one country, the Soviet Union, without waiting for revolution to occur in the main capitalist countries (a position he had developed as an integral part of his struggle against Trotsky) was not far removed from the line pursued by Lenin in 1921 when he introduced the New Economic Policy. Both Lenin and Stalin accepted the primary importance of the survival and strengthening of the Soviet state as the main bastion of the future world revolution; both accepted the need for a period of coexistence and trade with the capitalist countries as a means of strengthening socialism in Soviet Russia. Nor did Stalin's later policy of [industrialization](#) and [collectivization](#), in theory at least, represent a departure from Lenin's doctrine. Industrialization was central to Lenin's plans, though he did not live to put them into practice. Stalin's view, however, that the construction of socialism led inevitably to an intensification of the class struggle, which in turn required a policy of internal repression and terror, is nowhere to be found in Lenin's writings. On the contrary, Lenin repeatedly emphasized in 1922 and 1923 the necessity of bringing about a reconciliation of the classes and especially of the peasants and workers.

Stalin's internal policy was to have wide repercussions in the Comintern and on Communism generally. From 1924 until 1928 his first concern was to defeat his main rival, [Trotsky](#), and this seems to have been one of the main factors determining his policy at this time. As against the more internationalist and doctrinaire Trotsky, Stalin pursued “socialism in one country” and continued to implement Lenin's New Economic Policy with its limited freedom for business enterprise and peasant individualism. In this he could still claim to be following Lenin's wishes. But Stalin also worked with great skill to ensure his control over the party. By 1927 when Trotsky was expelled from the party, Stalin already controlled both the network of party officials (the apparat) and the delegates to congresses and conferences. Debate had been replaced by ritualized unanimity; dissent was permitted only when it served the purposes of the leadership.

When Trotsky was exiled from the country in 1929, he became the focal point for opposition to Stalin among dissident Communists all over the world, although he was to be more a symbol than an active political force. Having defeated Trotsky and his allies, Stalin next switched policies, abandoning the New Economic Policy in favour of rapid industrialization along with the collectivization of agriculture. The collectivization policy ultimately produced a famine, costing the lives of millions of peasants. The reversal of the New Economic Policy and of Lenin's policy necessarily involved eliminating from the political scene Stalin's former allies, headed by [Nikolay Bukharin](#), who wanted to go slower with industrialization and to cultivate support among the peasants. The protracted conflict, first with Trotsky and his ally [G.Y. Zinovyev](#) and then with Bukharin, was reflected in the Comintern and in the world Communist movement, which became increasingly subordinated to Stalin's policy concerns inside the Soviet Union.

Stalin and the Comintern

The regimentation of the Comintern and of the parties represented in it began at the fifth world congress in June 1924, immediately after Lenin's death. The elimination of Trotsky and his supporters within the Soviet party was followed by widespread expulsions of the “left” from the other world parties. The control of the Soviet-dominated Comintern apparatus was increasingly asserted over the tightly disciplined governing bodies of the foreign parties, which in turn ruled over their members with the instrument of the purge. Ideologically, this procedure was carried out at first under the screen of the United Front, which called for cooperation with Social Democrats and other moderate leftists. At the sixth world congress in 1928, however, a further switch in policy was dictated by Stalin's internal conflict: the United Front tactic was abandoned, and the Social Democrats now became enemies along with Fascists. The sixth congress also declared the main duty of the international working-class movement to be the support of the U.S.S.R. by every means. The united front tactic was revived in 1935 at the seventh (and last) world congress of the Comintern under the name of the [Popular Front](#), calling for united action by Communists and Socialists together against Fascism.

Comintern policy changed again in August 1939 when the Soviet Union and Germany concluded a 10-year [treaty of nonaggression](#). This had the effect of freeing Hitler to fight a war against Britain and France. Anti-Fascism was now jettisoned, and the Communist parties were required, up to the moment when Germany invaded the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941, to denounce the allied war against Hitler and to recognize Nazism as “the lesser evil” in comparison with Western imperialism. The Soviet alliance with Germany is usually seen as proof that Stalin was primarily concerned with what he considered to be the interests of the Soviet Union. A secret protocol annexed to the treaty assigned the Baltic states (Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia), about half of Poland, and Bessarabia to the Soviet sphere of influence. The evidence suggests that Stalin considered the deal with Hitler to be based on mutual interests; the German invasion in 1941 took him by surprise. After the defeat of Hitler, Soviet territorial demands were again advanced.

Stalin's method of rule

The Communist parties of the world were also called on to adopt official Soviet justifications for Stalin's internal [purges](#), which involved the extermination of a large proportion of the Soviet party membership, including most of the leading cadres. The subservience of some Communist parties to official assertions made by the Soviet authorities sometimes earned them the reputation of being little more than agents of the Soviet Union inside their own countries, though this did not necessarily diminish their influence or importance in several countries of Europe or in the United States. They found much support among sympathizers with Marxism, who were prepared to overlook Soviet realities in the service of their ideals or of what they considered to be the historical destiny of mankind—in which they saw Stalinism as merely a transitory stage. The Communists and their parties and their contacts provided a valuable recruiting ground for intelligence agents of all kinds prepared to act against their own countries in the interests of Soviet Russia. The effects of Stalin's internal policy on the Communist parties outside the Soviet Union are of vital importance in understanding the attitude adopted by these parties after 1956, when much of Stalin's policy was officially repudiated.

Stalin's method of rule came, by imitation, to be the standard in all other parties. It hinged primarily upon the dominance of his own personality. He ruled over the country in large measure not through the party, as Lenin had, but through personal agents (like [Lavrenty Beria](#), Andrey Vyshinsky, or Georgy Malenkov) and also through the security police (NKVD). The party as an institution declined under Stalin, and between 1934 and 1952 there was only one party congress, in 1939. The general secretaries of the Communist parties abroad imitated Stalin, and strict hierarchical subordination became the way of party life.

Growth of communism during and after World War II

The undeclared assault by Hitler on the Soviet Union provoked a wave of sympathy for that country among both the open and secret enemies of Hitler in Europe. The Soviet pact with Hitler, and even the manifest blemishes of Stalin's regime, were forgotten: sympathy with the newly emerged force of resistance to the Nazi scourge far outweighed past memories. Many, it is true, expected the immediate defeat of the Soviet Union. As time went on, however, and the Soviet struggle continued with enormous sacrifice of life and with courage and skill that none could help but applaud, admiration for Soviet military achievements grew even among those who had been most critical and apprehensive of the Soviet political role before the war. The Communists of other countries shared in the prestige won by Soviet military prowess. This was particularly the case in occupied [France](#) and [Italy](#) where the underground Communist parties played a vital role in the resistance movements. In [Yugoslavia](#), too, the Communist partisan movement led by [Tito \(Josip Broz\)](#) outstripped the nationalist guerrillas in effectiveness and won the material support of Britain.

Russian [nationalism](#)

The policy pursued by Stalin accentuated the nationalist side of the war and attempted in every way to play down the Communist element. At home, tsarist history and the rituals of the Eastern Orthodox Church were invoked in efforts to raise patriotic sentiments to the highest possible pitch. Abroad, Communist aims and ideals were replaced by anti-Nazi, liberal-democratic slogans. The dissolution of the Comintern in 1943 was in line with this policy. It had long ceased to be necessary as an instrument of Soviet control over the foreign Communist parties, which was carried on through other channels; but the publicizing of its dissolution added force to the growing persuasion abroad that the Soviet Union had left its revolutionary past behind it and was now a great power with traditional nationalist and security aims. Stalin himself emphasized that the dissolution of the Comintern would “put an end to the lies spread by Hitler that the Soviet Union wished to Bolshevize other countries” and that Communist parties “followed foreign directives.” Still another factor promoting the influence of Communism during World War II was the enhanced prestige of Stalin himself and the extent to which his personality influenced the allied leaders Winston Churchill and Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Stalin and eastern Europe

His growing military and political prestige in turn influenced Stalin's policy toward his allies and determined the future course of Communism after victory was won in 1945. Two main lines of Soviet policy can be discerned in the wartime conferences at Tehrān, Yalta, and elsewhere: first, a determination by the Soviet Union that friendly political regimes should be established in the countries on Russia's borders, and second, that the Soviet Union's hard-won status as a great power should be fully recognized in the postwar settlements. These demands were not in themselves unreasonable, considering the enormous price that the Soviet people had paid for victory. In pursuing the creation of a solid Soviet-dominated bloc of Communist states in east-central Europe, Stalin was able to take advantage of the presence of a victorious Soviet army in Poland, Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, and East Germany. The cases of Yugoslavia and Albania were different, but the regimes that emerged in all these countries were broadly similar forms of Communist party domination based on the Soviet model, even though the ways in which the Communists achieved power varied.

Broadly speaking, three phases could be distinguished. In the first phase there was a genuine coalition of Communist and Socialist parties. This lasted until the spring of 1945 in Romania and Bulgaria, until the spring of 1947 in Hungary, and until February 1948 in [Czechoslovakia](#). Yugoslavia, Albania, Poland, and East Germany never knew this phase: the former two started as “monolithic,” while the latter two began their postwar history in the second phase, an alleged coalition in which the Socialist parties were nominally independent and had some share in power but in which their leaders and policies were largely determined by the Communists. In the third phase, the “monolithic” phase, the nominally independent Socialist parties were required to fuse with the Communists, political opposition was largely suppressed, and Socialist leaders went into exile or were dealt with by staged treason trials. In Poland, Bulgaria, and Romania the third phase began in the autumn of 1947; in Hungary, in the spring of 1948. In East Germany the third phase was complete by 1949.

In his policy toward the countries which were destined to form the Soviet bloc, Stalin was aided in part by the inability or unwillingness of the Western allied powers to take steps during the first or second phases described above to prevent the beginning of the third phase and in part by the skillful infiltration of local Communists into key positions. The peasant and Socialist parties, which had substantial support in their countries, were attacked in various ways and demolished as independent political bodies.

Yugoslavia was an exception. There the Communists under the leadership of Tito enjoyed a considerable measure of mass support because of their wartime role as partisan fighters. The People's Democracy they instituted in Yugoslavia was for some years little different in character from that of other Communist-party-dominated states of eastern Europe. An attempt to set up a People's Democracy in [Greece](#) failed after three years of civil war, in which the Greek Communists were supported by Yugoslav aid.

In the countries of Europe outside the Soviet bloc, Communist parties proved unable to exploit the prestige that they had acquired during the war. Both in France and in Italy they enjoyed considerable support: in the parliamentary election of 1945 in [France the Communists](#) received 26 percent of the vote, and in the general elections to the Constituent Assembly in [Italy](#) in June 1946 they received 19 percent. Both parties, however, failed to achieve real national power in the postwar period; their role was confined to fomenting strikes and disorder in the interests of Soviet policy. The detailed story of the Italian and French Communist parties during the period 1945 to 1949 is complex, but, broadly speaking, their attempts at insurrection foundered against the facts of the power of the army and the police and a lack of revolutionary zeal among their worker supporters. On the other hand, their attempts to win power by parliamentary means were frustrated by the distrust that the Socialists felt for them as colleagues in Parliament or in government and by their own evident lack of interest in a viable parliamentary system.

Communism's growth in Asia

Powerful Communist parties emerged after the war in various parts of Asia, in many cases largely as a result of the resistance of the Western powers to growing nationalist movements. Communist-led insurrections, allegedly coordinated by Moscow, broke out in the summer of 1948 in Burma, Malaya, and Indonesia. In [Indochina](#), after the surrender of Japan, the Communists under [Ho Chi Minh](#) seized power in the three northern provinces of the country. French colonial policy helped drive the nationalists into the arms of Ho Chi Minh, and by the end of 1946 a guerrilla war had broken out in the country that was to last for nearly three decades before the Communist victory of 1975. In [Japan](#) democratic legislation imposed by the United States after its victory permitted the Communists to operate legally. In the succeeding few years they made little progress toward governmental power but won considerable gains in the trade unions and an important measure of influence among university students. In [India](#) the Communist Party supported the British war effort after June 1941 and gained ground as a result; it switched to violent insurrection after Indian independence but abandoned this policy in 1950.

The most significant factor in the postwar history of Communism in Asia may have been the victory in 1949 of the [Chinese Communist Party](#) under the leadership of [Mao Tse-tung](#). [China](#), rather than the Soviet Union, seemed destined to play the leading role in Asian Communism. The victory of the Chinese Communists over Chiang Kai-shek and the Kuomintang, like that of Tito's forces in Yugoslavia, owed little if anything to Soviet aid—save that the Russians had handed over to the Chinese Communists the military stores captured from the Japanese during the very short period when the U.S.S.R. was at war with Japan in 1945. Although the Chinese Communist Party had developed under the aegis of the Comintern and acknowledged the doctrinal authority of Lenin and Stalin, its experience had been very different. Its victory had been preceded by long guerrilla warfare. Mao's rise to power had, moreover, been achieved by ignoring Soviet advice as much as by following it. Stalin showed quite clearly from the outset that he intended to keep China in a position of subordination not unlike that which he had successfully marked out for most of eastern Europe—a status the Chinese Communist leaders were not likely to accept. Culturally, economically, and geographically, China was in a strong position to become the model for Communist revolution in Asia and to wrest the leadership of Asian Communism from the Soviet Union. These and other factors were to produce signs of a possible breach between China and the U.S.S.R. within less than 10 years of the proclamation of the Chinese People's Republic on October 1, 1949.

The world movement up to Stalin's death

The wartime alliance had given rise to some hopes that Soviet-Western amity would continue. Stalin's relentless pursuit of security through the domination of neighbouring countries shattered this hope. At home Stalin returned to his prewar tactics: widespread arrests and deportations occurred in the newly incorporated or reincorporated territories of the Soviet Union; the restriction of cultural life was intensified; the straitjacket was reimposed on the party, on the peasants, and on the industrial workers. There is some evidence to suggest that at the time of his death in March 1953 Stalin was planning a new purge on the scale of the 1936–38 purges.

The struggle with the West

Soviet expansion into eastern Europe led to counteractions by the Western powers that Moscow interpreted as part of a master plan to encircle and subjugate the Soviet Union. These included the [Truman Doctrine](#) of containment of Soviet expansion proclaimed in March 1947; the offer in June of that year by United States Secretary of State George [Marshall](#) to underwrite the economic recovery of Europe; and the [North Atlantic Treaty](#) of April 1949, which established a permanent defense force for western Europe, including in its orbit West Germany. Another factor that affected Soviet policy was the monopoly of the atomic bomb enjoyed by the United States from 1945 until 1949. The Soviet Union rejected the [Baruch Plan](#) put forward by the U.S. for the international control of atomic weapons and made every effort to produce its own, succeeding in September 1949. The “[Cold War](#)” was on.

The defection of Yugoslavia

In September of 1947 a new international organization, the Communist Information Bureau ([Cominform](#)), was established. Unlike the old Third International (Comintern), the Cominform was limited in membership to the Communist parties of the Soviet-dominated countries of east-central Europe and to the French and Italian Communist parties. The aim of the Cominform was to consolidate and expand Communist rule in Europe. Plans for the establishment of Communist rule in Czechoslovakia were discussed, and the French and Italian parties were reproved for their failure to win power in their own countries.

The Cominform did not prove a success. Certainly one of its purposes was to hold Yugoslavia more securely within the Communist fold, and for this reason Belgrade was chosen as the seat of the new organization. But within a few months a quarrel broke out between the Soviet and Yugoslav parties, and when the Cominform held its second meeting in June 1948, it was for the purpose of denouncing the [Yugoslav Communist Party](#) and expelling it from the organization. The quarrel with Yugoslavia resulted largely from Tito's refusal to submit to domination by the Soviet Union; there was also some suspicion on the Soviet side, possibly well founded, that the Yugoslav party leader hoped to build up a bloc of Communist states in southeastern Europe that would not be totally dependent on the Soviet Union.

The effect of the Soviet-Yugoslav quarrel, which has never completely healed, was momentous. First, it shattered the doctrine that the Communist movement must be monolithic, since a Communist party had challenged Moscow and survived. Second, Yugoslavia, having broken with the U.S.S.R., was in a position to assume a role of considerable influence in the world, especially toward states formed in formerly colonial territories. The Yugoslavs could speak as Communists who, while opposed to the policy of the imperialist powers, were no mere agents of Soviet policy. This position carried a particularly strong appeal in India, but the impact of the Soviet quarrel with Tito was much wider.

A third effect of the Yugoslav defection was a tightening of the Soviet hold over the remaining members of the Communist bloc. In Soviet-dominated lands "Titoism" became synonymous with treason, much as "Trotskyism" had been in the '30s. Purges and public trials ensued throughout eastern Europe. In some cases, like that of [Władysław Gomułka](#) in Poland (who was left alive), or Koci Xoxe in Albania, the charge of sympathy with Yugoslavia may have been true; in others, like those of [László Rajk](#) in Hungary or [Traicho Kostov](#) in Bulgaria, the offense may have been only an attempt to resist Soviet domination; in the trial of [Rudolf Slánský](#) in Czechoslovakia in 1952, a strong anti-Semitic element played a part. Countries of the Communist bloc were seething with anti-Soviet and nationalist feeling by the time Stalin died. Though Stalin's postwar policy was successful in extending the boundaries of Soviet military and political control well into eastern and central Europe, Communism did not win out in France or in Italy, where its chances had appeared strongest. The policy of expansionism and of intransigence founded on suspicion of the United States led to a kind of consolidation of the West against the Soviet Union. In the Far East the [Korean War](#) was probably not a success from the Communist point of view. Korea had been divided after the defeat of Japan: in the [northern](#)

[part](#) a Communist government came to power in elections held in November 1946, and in [the south](#) a non-Communist government was established. Each claimed to be the legal government of the whole country. Invasion of the south by the north in June 1950 was condemned by the [Security Council](#) of the United Nations as aggression, and the Security Council approved military assistance to South Korea under a unified American command. (The absence of the Soviet representative from the Security Council prevented the U.S.S.R. from vetoing this resolution.) The long war, in which China intervened on the side of North Korea, brought heavy burdens and few, if any, advantages, and the conflict between the major powers that it involved led them in the fears of many to the verge of world war. In June 1951 the Soviet Union proposed discussions for an armistice, to which the Western powers agreed. The negotiations were protracted and did not result in an armistice until after Stalin's death in 1953.

The breakup of the world Communist monolith

The Khrushchev era

Stalin died on March 5, 1953. For a short time, until the beginning of 1955, power was nominally divided between [Georgy Malenkov](#), the chairman of the Council of Ministers, and [Nikita Khrushchev](#), the first secretary of the Communist Party. Almost from the beginning, Khrushchev was the dominant of the two; his victory over his rival was only a matter of time. Malenkov, it would seem, decided quite early that the Soviet Union could not maintain its hold over the Eastern bloc without substantial economic relaxation. The difficulties that always beset the reform of an oppressive regime were soon illustrated in East Germany. Within a week of the announcement by East German leaders that “aberrations” of the past would be rectified and some of the hardships of life alleviated, there was an uprising in the streets of East Berlin; it spread to other parts of [East Germany](#) and was quelled only by the use of Soviet armed forces. The blame for this was laid on [Lavrenty Beria](#) (the Soviet security chief, shortly to be deposed and executed) and by implication on Malenkov. The new relaxed policy continued, however, in most of the Soviet-bloc countries. Economic reforms were initiated in Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Poland, but the system of political rule remained unchanged.

Khrushchev, who by the beginning of 1955 had ousted Malenkov, had a comprehensive vision of how the Eastern bloc should be run. He was determined to find a way out of the straitjacket in which Stalin had confined Soviet life; the outcome was to have momentous consequences for Soviet dependencies abroad, which Khrushchev probably did not at the time foresee. His policy toward the Communist satellite countries may be summarized as one of cooperative integration instead of exploitation, with some degree of economic and political autonomy (under Communist Party leadership). A political and military convention between the European Communist states and the U.S.S.R. (the [Warsaw Pact](#)) was signed in May 1955. Khrushchev also sought to redesign the [Council for Mutual Economic Assistance](#) (COMECON), the Communist counterpart of western Europe's Common Market, which Stalin had set up in January 1949: he tried, with indifferent success, to transform COMECON into a device for promoting division of labour, economic specialization, and technical and financial cooperation among the countries of the bloc.

The crises of 1956

In order to demonstrate that Stalin's policy was a thing of the past, Khrushchev made substantial efforts to effect a reconciliation with Tito and the Yugoslav Communists (against the opposition of some of his colleagues, including Vyacheslav Molotov). An agreement with Yugoslavia in June 1956 recognized that “the conditions of Socialist development are different in different countries” and stated that no Socialist country should impose its views on another. This was a momentous change in policy, since it meant that a country could be described as “Socialist” without being obliged to follow all the practices adopted by the Soviet Union or every Soviet turn in foreign relations.

The reconciliation with Yugoslavia was only one of several important events that made the year 1956 a watershed in the history of Communism. In February, at the 20th congress of the Communist Party, Khrushchev delivered a [speech in secret](#) session in which he attacked the period of [Stalin's](#) rule in most forthright terms. The speech was not published within the Soviet Union, but its text was widely circulated among Communists both within and outside the Soviet Union and was published by the U.S. State Department. Its effect was enormous. Although the disclosures were neither complete nor entirely new, the fact that Khrushchev had uttered them caused a ferment in the Communist movement that was to prove irreversible. It inaugurated a period of freedom of debate and criticism that had been unknown for a quarter of a century; despite efforts both by Khrushchev and by his successors to keep criticism of the “cult of personality” (the accepted euphemism for Stalin's misdeeds) within bounds, the ferment could not be contained.

The [Hungarian Revolution](#)

In the European Communist countries, Khrushchev's disclosures opened the floodgates of pent-up criticism and resentment against the local Stalin-type leaders. In [Hungary](#), [Mátyás Rákosi](#) was ousted as party leader in July 1956 and replaced by [Ernő Gerő](#). But Gerő was unable to contain the rising tide of unrest and discontent, which broke out into active fighting late in October, and appealed for Soviet help. The first phase of the Hungarian Revolution ended in victory for the rebels: [Imre Nagy](#) became premier and agreed, in response to popular demands, to establish a multiparty system; on November 1 he declared Hungarian neutrality and appealed to the United Nations. On November 4 the Soviet Union, profiting from the lack of response to Nagy from the Western powers, and from the British and French involvement in action against Egypt, invaded Hungary in force and stopped the revolution. In Poland, where the ferment was also reaching dangerous intensity, the Soviet Union accepted a new party leadership headed by the more moderate Władysław Gomułka. There are believed to have been two reasons for this difference in Soviet policy. One was that in Poland the Communist Party remained in control of the situation. The other was that the invasion and subjugation of Poland would have required a military force several times that required in Hungary.

Polycentrism

Inside the Communist states, the suppression of the Hungarian Revolution had a restraining effect. There was, nevertheless, no return to the Stalinist type of domination and exploitation; a slow evolution followed toward a degree of internal autonomy, even in Hungary. The events of 1956 also had profound effects upon Communists outside the Soviet bloc. There were many resignations after the Hungarian Revolution, and those who remained in the fold began to question both Soviet leadership and the nature of a system that had made the ascendancy of Stalin possible. The most trenchant questioning came from the leader of the Italian Communist Party, [Palmiro Togliatti](#), who concluded that the Soviet pattern could no longer be the model for all other countries and called in June 1956 for decentralization of the Communist movement, a view that became known as “polycentrism.” “The whole system becomes polycentric, and . . . we cannot speak of a single guide but rather of a progress which is achieved by following paths which are often different.” Although the Italian Communist Party, or segments of it, were still prepared to support the Soviet Union at times of crisis, at other times it took positions different from those of the Soviet Union.

The [Sino-Soviet dispute](#)

A gathering of Communist parties in Moscow in November 1957, in which China played a leading role, attempted to reassert a common doctrine while recognizing the need for differences in national practice. At Chinese insistence it also retained the Stalinist emphasis on the leadership of the Soviet Union. For a short time relations between the Soviet Union and China were harmonious: after 1955 Khrushchev had put an end to the humiliating terms that Stalin had imposed on China and inaugurated a policy of substantial economic aid.

The differences between China and the Soviet Union, which were to erupt into an open campaign of mutual abuse by 1962, were discernible to most observers by 1959, when the Soviet Union failed to give immediate political backing to Chinese military action against India and when China, at the same time, showed suspicion of Soviet talks with the United States in pursuit of Khrushchev's policy of “[peaceful coexistence](#).” In 1960 the differences widened, though they were still unpublicized. The Soviet Union withdrew its technical advisers from China as a preliminary to what was to prove an almost complete severing of economic relations. A facade of agreement was maintained, and at a conference of Communist parties held in Moscow in 1960 a series of resolutions was put forth to show that unity prevailed as ever in the ranks of the world Communist movement. News of serious disagreements, however, soon leaked out, for the increasing number of dissident groups within the several parties had by now rendered the maintenance of secrecy impossible. In the following year, 1961, the Soviet Union began a public polemic against the Chinese viewpoint. This was disguised as an attack on [Albania](#), since 1959 a client of China and increasingly critical of Khrushchev's foreign policy. By 1962 the quarrel had become open and very bitter. It was conducted as a dispute over doctrine, but the practical issue underlying it was a basic rivalry for leadership of the world revolutionary movement.

The Sino-Soviet dispute had three major effects on this movement. It shattered the pretension that Marxism-Leninism offered a single world view, since at least two radically different ways of interpreting Marxism-Leninism were presented to Communists throughout the world, each backed by a Communist party in power with the prestige of a victorious revolution behind it. Second, it seriously impaired, if it did not destroy, the Soviet claim to be the leader of the world revolutionary movement. Since 1960 nearly all Communist parties have split into pro-Soviet and pro-Chinese portions, though outside Asia the Soviet portion has usually retained predominance. In the important parts of Asia, with the possible exception of India, where the party is divided into several warring factions, China has become the predominant influence upon Communist parties. Third, the mere fact of the dispute tended to create greater flexibility for individual parties within the Communist movement as a whole, even in the case of parties that nominally accepted Soviet leadership. The [Romanians](#), for example, were able to follow a nationalistic course by which they successfully resisted Soviet attempts to integrate the Romanian economy into the bloc pattern. The Romanians also took an independent line in their trade relations with other countries, in refusing to participate in the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia, and in their policy toward Israel.

After the fall of Khrushchev in October 1964, his successors made efforts to reunite the world movement. They were only moderately successful. Seventy-five parties met in Moscow in June 1969, but of 14 parties in power five did not attend, and Cuba sent only an observer; Asia and Africa, the main areas of Chinese influence, were very poorly represented. Little unity emerged from the conference; in particular, the efforts of the Soviet Union to secure condemnation of China were unsuccessful. The resolution finally adopted was couched in such general terms as scarcely to conceal that the cracks had been merely pasted over. In the course of the 1970s, the hold of the Soviet Communist party over Communist parties outside the bloc seemed for a time to become weaker, with several parties (notably of [France](#), Spain, and [Italy](#)) asserting independence from Moscow and the right to criticize Soviet policy. This movement, nicknamed "[Eurocommunism](#)," had lost much of its force by the end of the decade, however.

Problems of internal reform

A continuing problem in the history of Communist countries after the death of Stalin was the reform of their overcentralized political and economic structures. The only country that may be said to have achieved success was Yugoslavia, which had since 1948 asserted and maintained its independence from Soviet interference. After initially [collectivizing](#) much of its agriculture, Yugoslavia allowed the collective farms to dissolve. It also established [Workers' Councils](#) in the factories and publicized them in its foreign propaganda despite Soviet disapproval. The Yugoslav party program of 1958 contained three points in particular that were diametrically opposed to Soviet theory: that Socialism can be achieved without a revolution, that the Communist Party need not have a monopoly of leadership, and that danger of war arises from the existence of two power blocs in the world and not (as the Soviet Union contended) from the aggressive intentions of the United States. In January 1974, a new constitution was adopted that, apart from making changes in the representational system, provided for a collective presidency consisting of one member from each republic and autonomous province. [Tito](#) was elected

president for life; after his death in 1980 this office rotated among the several members of the collective presidency.

Suppression of reform in Czechoslovakia

The most dramatic failure of an attempt at reform was in Czechoslovakia. The resignation of the old Stalinist party leader Antonín Novotný and his replacement by [Alexander Dubček](#) in January 1968 inaugurated a process of liberalization. The reformers hoped to humanize Communist rule by introducing basic civil freedoms, an independent judiciary, and other democratic institutions. The support of leading economists for this program was particularly significant since it indicated that they realized that the already accepted policy of economic decentralization (which included giving a measure of initiative to individual enterprises) would fail unless accompanied by political changes.

While the Czechoslovak Communists had repeatedly declared their intention to remain within the existing system, Moscow, possibly fearing that the developments they had set under way would ultimately endanger the stability of eastern Europe, endeavoured to induce the Czechoslovak party leaders to abandon their course. The Soviet effort failed, possibly because there were no Czechoslovak Communist leaders prepared, with Soviet help, to oust Dubček. Finally a group of Warsaw Pact forces—predominantly Soviet, but with token contributions from the other Warsaw Pact members except Romania—invaded Czechoslovakia on the night of August 20–21, 1968, effectively killing the momentum of the reform movement in Czechoslovakia. A Soviet-controlled security service was installed, and the Dubček leadership was gradually forced out of top posts and eventually expelled from the party. Although the repression was thorough, there was no mass terror.

The Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia came as a greater shock to many Communists than the invasion of Hungary because it was directed against Communist leaders who strongly asserted their loyalty to Moscow. The motives that prompted Soviet action were probably two: one was the fear that the Soviet defense area created by Stalin after World War II might be endangered if the Dubček regime were allowed to continue; the other was the fear that the entrenched and conservative Communist parties in other European Communist countries, and in the Soviet Union itself, might not be equal to the challenge posed by a reformed Communism in Czechoslovakia.

Khrushchev's reforms

This concern that the power of the Communist party might be diminished may also have acted as a brake on internal reform. The reforms carried out by Khrushchev between 1953 and 1964 had been extensive. The arbitrary powers of the security police were brought under control; there were widespread reviews and rehabilitations (often posthumously) of the sentences of those sent to labour camps under Stalin; and reforms (in 1958) removed the worst anomalies of Soviet

criminal law and procedure. The stringent controls over the lives of workers and farmers were relaxed. Discussion and debate were tolerated among writers and intellectuals to a degree that would have been inconceivable under Stalin. The whole system of agricultural management was considerably relaxed, and a system of incentives for the collective farmers was introduced. The limit of reform, as Khrushchev saw it, was the point at which any threat appeared to the party's control over all aspects of life. Under his successor, [Leonid Brezhnev](#), the brake on reform was applied more heavily. Criticism of Stalin decreased. Freedom of opinion was considerably restricted by the introduction of penal provisions against “slandering” the Soviet system: for the first time since Stalin's death, there were trials of writers, and the courts ceased to show any inclination to assert their independence as they had under Khrushchev. The numbers of political prisoners steadily increased, although the Brezhnev regime could not be compared to Stalin's. A movement toward economic reform had started under Khrushchev, aiming at some decentralization of economic control through greater freedom for enterprises to plan their own operations and through more influence for market forces. This was continued and officially encouraged after 1964 by Prime Minister [Aleksey Kosygin](#), but it made little headway and was abandoned. The period of the 1970s was one of economic stagnation and conservatism coupled with expanded military power.

Communist doctrine after Stalin

The errors of “revisionism” and “dogmatism”

The most far-reaching innovation in Communist doctrine during the period 1953–70 was the Chinese interpretation of Marxism-Leninism known as Maoism. In the Soviet sphere several profound changes in doctrine took place after the death of Stalin. One change was the rise of ideological dispute for the first time since the early 1920s. The Yugoslav ideas were denounced as “[revisionism](#),” a term that harked back to the turn of the century when it had been used to characterize the views of Eduard Bernstein, who had argued that Socialism could be achieved without a revolution. After 1957 the terms “revisionism” and “dogmatism” became an integral part of Communist discourse. They were applied in a variety of meanings. By the Chinese, “revisionism” was used to mean, in effect, Khrushchevism—i.e., the policies that Khrushchev had introduced in both domestic and international relations and that the Chinese opposed. On the Soviet side, “revisionism” became a catchphrase to designate any political reform that appeared to endanger the dominance of the Communist Party. As defined at the Moscow conference of 1957 (with Chinese approval then), it was applied to all reform movements within the Communist system that denied “the historical necessity of the proletarian revolution,” or the “Leninist principles for the construction of the party.” The term “dogmatism,” in Soviet usage, meant a doctrinal conservatism that ignores changing realities, a clinging to received ideas in a way “calculated to alienate the party from the masses.” In practice the Soviets sought a course between revisionism and dogmatism.

Different roads to Socialism

Important new elements in Soviet doctrine were set out in the party program adopted by the 22nd congress in October 1961 (which were, to some extent, embodied in the declarations of the Moscow conferences of 1957 and 1960). First, there was the concession that there are different roads to Socialism. This may have been no more than a practical recognition of the fact that since the breach with [Yugoslavia](#) and the death of Stalin it had no longer been possible for the Soviet Union to impose its own pattern on all Communist states. The invasion of [Hungary](#) in 1956, of Czechoslovakia in 1968, and of Afghanistan in 1979 were not, according to Moscow, inconsistent with this doctrine, because in each case the Soviet Union acted out of a duty to assist a fraternal Socialist state in putting down a counterrevolution. In the case of [Czechoslovakia](#), which had not asked for such assistance, a new tenet was added by Brezhnev in November 1968. Known as the “Brezhnev Doctrine,” it contended that attempts by “internal and external” forces hostile to Socialism to restore capitalism in a Socialist country were a matter of concern to the whole Socialist community. This tenet was used to justify the action of the Warsaw Pact forces in 1968 and of the Soviet forces in 1979.

The second change in Soviet doctrine was the view that war between the capitalist and Socialist powers was no longer inevitable, as had always been asserted by both [Lenin](#) and [Stalin](#). This was a practical recognition of the fact that a war waged with nuclear weapons would be more likely to lead to mutual annihilation than to victory. Khrushchev emphasized the possibility of “[peaceful coexistence](#)” between different social systems and the achievement of Socialism by peaceful means. In the 1970s, peaceful coexistence became known as “[détente](#).” This doctrine raised hopes of real peace between Communist and non-Communist states, but the Soviet leaders made it clear that détente would not preclude either political warfare against the West or military support for wars of liberation. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 left détente seriously impaired.

The third doctrinal change after 1953 was also dictated by practical reality. The Comintern had rigidly applied concepts drawn from Western history to revolutions in Africa and Asia: industrialization, the emergence of a proletariat, and a Socialist revolution carried out under the leadership of a Communist party. This [Marxist](#) analysis proved to be totally unrealistic in the case of underdeveloped countries in which the predominant force was [nationalism](#). This was increasingly recognized, after 1956, in Soviet doctrine, which declared the proper revolutionary aim in the developing countries to be “national democracy.” In Khrushchev's words this meant accepting a “noncapitalist path of development,” which would be in the interests “not only of one class but of the broad strata of the people.”

In the late 20th century the Soviet leadership faced two main problems: a decline in the rate of economic growth, to which the party had tied its promises of an improved standard of living, and a ferment of criticism among an intellectual minority, which included an influential component of leading scientists. Two alternatives seemed the most likely: either a return to more repressive measures or a reform of the Soviet system.

[Leonard Bertram Schapiro](#)

The collapse of Soviet Communism

Following the death of Brezhnev in 1982, a new generation of less dogmatic party technocrats chose reform. Led by [Mikhail S. Gorbachev](#), who became general secretary in 1985 and president in 1988, Soviet leaders spoke of basic structural reform ([perestroika](#)) and more openness ([glasnost](#)) in Soviet society and in foreign policy. In what amounted to a fourth doctrinal change, Soviet leaders declared that Communist revolution was no longer the mission of the Soviet Union, nor would the country continue to serve as the ideological model for world Communism. Underscoring this doctrinal reversal, the Communist Party officially gave up its monopoly of power at the 28th party congress in 1990. The more relaxed attitude in Soviet society subsequently encouraged Soviet-bloc countries in eastern Europe and Africa to develop a more independent stance, and in fact many of them cast out their Communist leaders altogether. The dramatic reversal of fortune experienced by the Polish trade-union movement [Solidarity](#) was a prime example. Although it was outlawed by Communist authorities in 1980, only 10 years later its leader, [Lech Wałęsa](#), became president of Poland.

Fearing the disintegration of the [Soviet Union](#), in August 1991 a group of hard-line Communist officials detained Gorbachev and attempted to take control of the government. The coup failed after only three days, further encouraging the constituent republics to secede and dealing a deathblow to the already weakened Communist Party. On December 8, 1991, the leaders of Russia, Ukraine, and Belorussia (now Belarus) declared that the Soviet Union had ceased to exist. Gorbachev resigned as Soviet president on December 25, and all Soviet institutions ceased to function at the end of the year.

Reforms in China

Like the Soviet Union, Communist [China](#) also underwent fundamental changes in the 20th century. Following the economic failures of the [Cultural Revolution](#) (1966–76), it adopted a modernization plan designed to attract foreign investment; to improve agriculture, industry, science and technology, and defense; to allow greater individual freedom of choice; and to reduce the influence of political dogmatism in nonpolitical spheres of life. The economy, especially in South China, grew at a record pace from the late 1980s as the government introduced extensive free-market reforms, which were expanded further at a Communist Party plenum in November 1993. In March 1999 the People's Congress adopted two constitutional amendments, one affirming that private enterprise is "an important component of the socialist economy," the other stating that the country "should implement the principle of rule by law."