

What Is Communism? What Is its Real History? What Does It Have to Do with the World Today?

Q *What is communism?*

A Communism is a worldwide society in which all classes and class distinctions have been overcome; all systems and relations of exploitation abolished; all oppressive social institutions and relations of social inequality, like racial discrimination and the domination of women by men, put an end to; and all oppressive and backward ideas and values cast off. Communism is a world of abundance where people together hold all of society's resources in common. Communism also refers to the comprehensive outlook and scientific method of the proletariat for understanding and changing the world.

Q *But I always hear that communism is dull and dreary.*

A Imagine a society where people consciously learn about and transform the world...where people are no longer imprisoned by the chains of tradition and ignorance...where people not only cooperatively work to produce the necessities of life, but get into art and culture and science—and have fun doing it...where the scientific outlook and the flight of imagination strengthen and inspire each other...where there is unity and diversity, far-ranging debate, and ideological struggle over the direction and development of society—but no longer stamped by social antagonism...where people interact with each other based on mutual respect, concern, and love for humanity. A world that takes care of the environment. That is communism.

Q *How is socialism different from communism?*

A Socialism is the crucial step in getting to communism, which has yet to be achieved in the world. A socialist revolution overthrows the capitalist class and establishes the system of political rule of the working class: the dictatorship of the proletariat. The proletariat, together with its allies making up the great majority of society, begins to transform society. Socialist revolution creates an economy based on social ownership and meeting social need. But socialism also inherits social and economic inequalities from capitalism. It still contains classes. There is still class struggle over the direction of society. And for some time, socialist societies will be confronted by hostile capitalist powers. Socialism is a historical period of continuing revolution, and the worldwide advance to communism is a complex and protracted process of revolution and counterrevolution.

Q *Socialism might be good as an idea but has it really worked in practice?*

A The socialist revolutions in the Soviet Union (1917–56) and China (1949–76) made tremendous advances towards a liberated world. With state power in their hands, the former have-nots were taking hold of and transforming society. The rule of profit and exploitation was ended. Basic social needs were met. Life expectancy in Maoist China doubled between 1949 and 1976, from 32 to 65 years. Unprecedented strides were made in uprooting the oppression of women and minority nationalities. These revolutions did not fail but were defeated by bourgeois and reactionary forces (in the Soviet Union in 1956 and in China in 1976).

Q *Won't socialism or communism come up against the realities of human nature and selfishness?*

A There is no innate or unchanging “human nature.” People's thinking, behavior, and values are shaped by the economic structure and corresponding institutions and culture of a given society. Ancient Greek society and America's “founding fathers” regarded slavery as perfectly “normal.” Capitalism is organized around the private accumulation of profit and economic competition. Selfishness, greed, and individualism are rewarded by the workings of capitalism and promoted by the institutions of capitalist society. They are not “hard-wired” into our genes, and neither is racism or male supremacy.

Q *Hasn't the communist movement produced dictatorial figures like Stalin?*

A The widely promoted demonization and lies about Stalin stand in the way of gaining a real understanding of the historical role that he played and the great accomplishments of the Soviet Union. After Lenin's death in 1924, Stalin assumed leadership—and in the decade that followed, the Soviet Union was an exciting and emancipatory society. Stalin led the struggles to carry out collectivization of agriculture and to socialize the ownership of industry. The revolution created a socialist economy based on public-state ownership, social cooperation, and conscious planning. This had never been done before. Throughout Stalin's leadership, the Soviet Union faced incredible pressures: counterrevolution, encirclement by hostile imperial powers, and invasion by the Nazis during World War 2. Stalin led people to stand up to this. But Stalin also had real weaknesses. For example, as the revolution came under greater pressure in the 1930s, he relied less and less on the conscious activism of the masses and more and more on administrative measures. It was necessary to suppress counter-revolutionary forces. But as threats grew in the 1930s Stalin repressed people who were just raising disagreements and dissent. Bob Avakian points out that if the bourgeoisie can uphold Madison and Jefferson—who played pivotal roles in the bourgeois American Revolution but were unapologetic slave-owners—then revolutionaries can uphold Stalin while also criticizing and learning from his mistakes.

To Learn More About Socialism and Communism Read the Writings of Bob Avakian

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today in many Third World countries. And keep in mind that the amount of arable (farmable) land in China is only 70 percent of that in the U.S. but had to provide for four times as many people.

China under Mao accomplished what the U.S. has never done. It established a system of universal health care. Health services were provided free or at low cost, and the health system was guided by the principles of cooperation and egalitarianism. Maoist China integrated Western and traditional medicine. Some 1.3 million peasants were trained as health care providers (barefoot doctors) to meet basic health needs in the countryside.

To conclude

Not only is the real record of Maoist China light years apart from what you've been told.

It is also completely different from the polarized and sweatshop-ridden China of today, which has nothing in common with socialism or Mao.

References

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⁷See Teh-wei Hu, Health Care Services in China's Economic Development, in Robert F. Dernberger, ed., *China's Development Experience in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980).

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