What Is Communism?
By Sharon Fabian

What is communism? There are many definitions, and some of the definitions sound like nearly the opposite of other definitions. This is partly because the real explanation of communism is a complicated one. It is also partly because people have strong feelings about communism.

Some people remember that communism was a plan designed to make everyone equal and to give power to the average working man. A German philosopher, Karl Marx, explained his idea of communism in the early 1800s. Marx said that it was unfair for some people to be rich and for others to be poor. He said that the only way to change that was to get rid of private ownership of property. So, in his theory of communism, everyone owned everything together.

Other people remember the violence and the hardships that the people in Russia went through under communist rule. They also remember the fear of a communist attack that many Americans felt. These people are remembering what happened when communism was put into practice. Vladimir Lenin, a Russian dictator, established rule by the Communist Party in Russia in the early 1900s. In Communist Russia, people had very little freedom. People were forced to do the work that the government dictated, and violence against Russian citizens became common. Russian citizens also became very poor under communist rule.

So what does the word communism actually mean?

One meaning of communism is the goal, or the ideal, of a society in which everyone is equal. This was how Karl Marx explained communism.

Another meaning of communism is the economic system in which many things are owned in common. In a communist system, the government owns the factories and the machines. The government owns the farmland. It owns the banks. It controls the transportation and communication systems. Private businesses are not allowed under a communist system.

The word communism also refers to a form of government. In a communist government, the Communist Party controls everything. In this type of government, the people might vote, but they would have only one party to vote for.

Communism can also refer to a revolutionary movement where communists try to overthrow the government of a country. Sometimes when a country is poor, or when its citizens have little freedom, the people hope that a revolution will bring a better way of life. This is the way that communists took over in some countries.

The answer to the question, "What is communism?" is that communism is all of these things. Maybe the original theory of communism was a good theory. Maybe it wasn't. All that we can be sure of is that, in practice, communism had some terrible results. By the late 1980s, communist countries were getting poorer and poorer. Necessities like food were getting scarce. Communist economies were not able to compete with the free economies of the West. That is why communist countries, like Russia, have been changing in recent years. They have begun to adopt ideas like individual freedoms and free enterprise that have been successful in western countries like the United States.
What Is Communism?

Questions

1. Communism is ______.
   A. a theory
   B. a type of government
   C. an economic system
   D. all of the above

2. The theory of communism was proposed by ______.
   A. an American
   B. Vladimir Lenin
   C. a revolutionary leader
   D. Karl Marx

3. In a communist economic system, people ______.
   A. cannot own a business
   B. do not have to work
   C. can own a farm, but not a factory
   D. can start their own business

4. A communist country has ______ powerful political party/parties.
   A. one
   B. two
   C. many
   D. three

5. Communist revolutionaries can sometimes take over in a country when the people are ______.
   A. well educated
   B. wealthy
   C. poor
   D. curious

6. By the ______, communism was declining.
   A. 1800s
   B. 1980s
   C. 1900s
   D. 1960s

7. Which happened first?
   A. Lenin brought communism to Russia.
   B. Russia began to adopt western ideas.
   C. Marx explained his theory of communism.
   D. Communist governments owned all of the factories and farms in their country.

8. From the information in the article, you might conclude that ______.
   A. many more European countries are becoming communist
   B. the US became a communist country
   C. Russia is now a dictatorship
   D. Communism is not as widespread as it once was
Explain in your own words what the word "communism" means.

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Communism took over in many countries in the early 1900s. Many more countries had large Communist Parties at one time. Why do you think communism never became popular in the United States?

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