

Communist ideals versus reality.

Communism is an ideology that was brought to prominence by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels through their political pamphlet the Manifesto of the Communist Party. Communism offers ideals of a new social order and a classless system to erase inequality,¹ but when implemented it has historically had negative effects on the populations subjected to it. I found myself interested in this contrast between the ideals and the reality of communism and wanted to challenge my limited knowledge on the subject. I intend to explore the core ideals of communism, while also showcasing the harsh reality of its implementation and the flaws that lead to its failure in Europe.

In the Manifesto of the Communist Party, Marx and Engels highlight the historical competition between the bourgeoisie and the proletarians,² and how this tension has always led to revolution.³ The communist goal is to build a new social order where production is controlled by society and private property ownership is banned,⁴ thus discarding the need for competition. It seems that communism has ideals of equality, where peace will come from everyone having what they need and no one is exploited or left to suffer. These ideals have always been appealing to me, especially as I would consider myself far from a member of the bourgeoisie. However, it is clear when listening to other perspectives on communism that this ideology comes with its own fair share of issues as well.

To introduce myself to the reality of a corrupt communist system, I decided to read the novel *Animal Farm* by George Orwell. The novel was written in response to the rise of communism in Europe during the 1930s.⁵ It showcases how over time noble ideals can get corrupted and manipulated for the benefit of those craving control. I believe the quote 'all animals are equal but some animals are more equal than others'⁶ displays how even in a communist system there will be those who have more power than others, and that this power is likely to go to their heads and disadvantage everyone else.

When I went on to study what life was like for people living under communism in Europe in the 1900s, the reality seemed staggeringly different from the ideals originally proposed on paper. It was obvious that in the pursuit of equality, some freedoms had to be sacrificed. The press was censored or completely silenced,⁷ private farms and

¹ Frederick Engels, *The Principles of Communism*, (1914).

<<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1847/11/prin-com.htm>> [accessed 13 June 2026].

² Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, (1848), p. 14.

³ Ibid., p. 14.

⁴ Engels, *The Principles of Communism*.

⁵ George Orwell, *Animal farm*, Appendix 2, (1945), p. 116.

⁶ Orwell, *Animal Farm*, p. 97.

⁷ Sabrina P. Ramet, *East Central Europe and Communism : Politics, Culture, and Society, 1943–1991 - Record Details - EBSCOhost Research Databases*, p. 4. <<https://research-ebSCO->

livestock were forcibly surrendered even though this had a negative impact on productivity,⁸ religion was suppressed,⁹ and the perceived benefits of living under a communist system such as universal healthcare and financial security all hinged on a person's conformity.¹⁰



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This photo taken in the USSR by Valeriy Reshetnyak felt impactful to me. It showcases people waiting in a line at the backdoor of a shop to buy scarce items before a public holiday. I think it paints a bleak reality of life under communism. The broken crates that everyone ignores in favour of staking their place in line for goods they're not guaranteed, shows how ugliness and displeasure is drowned out by desperation. All of these people were trapped in a communist country, unable to do more than wait for a small sense of comfort around the public holidays.

Despite my prior compliments of communist ideals, I found myself growing wary of this ideology because of its historical implementation. Corruption of these original ideals did have a part to play in why the ideals seemed so different to reality, however it made me aware of how flawed the ideals were in the first place. When reading *The Principles of Communism* by Frederick Engels, he noted that communism would make 'all existing

com.uwtsd.idm.oclc.org/c/onvpsy/search/details/ylr5gwbv5z?request-context=plink&db=e001mww> [accessed 12 June 2026].

⁸ Ibid., p. 4.

⁹ Ibid., p. 5.

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 5-6.

¹¹ Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, *In Photos: What Was Life Really Like In The U.S.S.R.?*, <<https://www.rferl.org/a/photographs-shot-by-soviet-engineer-show-the-harsh-reality-of-life-in-the-ussr/30675553.html>> [accessed 13 June 2026].

religions superfluous and brings about their disappearance'.¹² Similar was said about nationality. I found these answers to complicate the fair nature of communist ideals, as both concepts hold real meaning for people and if they are forced to conform to this new order, it simply feels like a way to control citizens.

There are a multitude of reasons why communism failed in Europe. After the fall of the Soviet Union, research was conducted in China to understand the mistakes they had made. Some factors included lack of preparedness of the Soviet leadership, mishandling of nationality issues, and domestic political division.¹³ It also came down to the Soviet Union's fragile economy¹⁴ and high debts,¹⁵ which some people place most of the blame on. In the end, communism seemed to do more harm than good for the world. Anyone can write down a list of ideals, but it proves much harder to implement them successfully.

Throughout my research, I realized I was only scratching the surface of communist history. I originally struggled to understand the negativity people felt towards communism due to my limited knowledge of the subject, but after learning more, I was able to see the suffering people faced at the hands of this political system. The ideals turned out to be very different than reality, and it has encouraged me to be more proactive in expanding my knowledge. Going forward I will continue to delve into the history of communism and its place in the world today.

¹² Engels, *The Principles of Communism*.

¹³ Yanjie Huang, 'Ideology Strikes Back: China's Lessons of the Soviet Collapse, 1992–2022', *Problems of Post-Communism*, (2024) p. 581.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 581.

¹⁵ Ramet, *East Central Europe and Communism : Politics, Culture, and Society, 1943–1991*, p. 2.

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