

Never forget – the lessons of Communism

Matthew Cserhati

Never forget

Nowadays fewer and fewer people have a clear concept of just what exactly Communism was. For example, many younger people mix up Eastern Block countries such as Hungary or Poland with countries which made up the former Soviet Union. While Jewish people have much more successfully kept the memory of Auschwitz and the Holocaust alive, a lot less people have an idea of what the horror of Communism was like. We must remember, that compared to Nazism, Communism was an ideology which was in power for a longer period of time, it took hold in geographical regions much larger than Nazism did, and killed an estimated 100 million people making it the most evil and destructive ideology that ever existed on the face of this planet. Never forget.

In the following, we will take a look at how Communism affected people's lives with a main focus on the Republic of Hungary, touching more widely on Eastern Europe since I myself am a descendent of Hungarian immigrants who fled Communism, and have lived in Hungary for 18 years. This must be done to serve justice to the memories of those multitudes who died as a victim of this ideology. Many in the West are simply naïve, fickle, and unknowledgeable of what happened during the 40/70 years of Communism, and how Socialist-Communist ideas are affecting not just the United States but many, many countries around the world today. We must remember, that history repeats itself, and if we do not learn lessons from history, then we shall be doomed to repeat it.

Communism and the economy

As a friend of mine in Hungary put it, the former Soviet Union was the single largest country in the world. It had vast resources: coal, minerals, oil, agricultural land, mines, it was surrounded by thousands of miles of coasts and had a population over 100 million. Clearly, if Communism had been even a remote success, then it should have worked during the 72 years that it had been tried in the Soviet Union, the ultimate social laboratory for Communism. Yet the clear, practical results of Communism are that it has failed badly wherever and whenever it was tried. Idiocy is the same as trying something over and over again when it has only been shown to have failed. There is no sense in beating a dead horse. Some of the biggest memorials of the failures of Communism are the 5 year famine in the Ukraine, the bread basket of the Soviet Union, or the dilapidated, crumbling walls of decades-old buildings in the cities of Eastern Europe built under the red star, buildings which I had lived in, studied in, and worked in. The Socialist party after Communism did just as bad, or worse. The state treasury had even less money at the end of the Medgyessy-Gyurcsany-Bajnai administration (these are 3 Hungarian Socialist prime ministers who resigned one after the other within 8 years) in 2010 than at the end of Communism in 1989. Communism made huge wrecks of whole countries. In Hungary for example Communism pushed the country into such poverty that they weren't able to renovate buildings for years. It took 20 years to replace old, graffiti covered metro cars made in Russia in the subway system in Budapest. In some countries such as Romania whole villages didn't even have plumbing. **In Romania for example, many people still used horses and wagons for transportation after the fall of Communism.**

The basic concept of Communism was laid down in Karl Marx's *Das Kapital* (Capital), which he dedicated to the English naturalist, Charles Darwin, whose evolutionary theory actually laid a solid foundation for Communism. The basic hue and cry of the exploited poor – workers and farmers was voiced in this book. Basically, with regards to money and the economy, Marxism is an expression of envy of the upper classes by the lower classes. In it we can see how the love of money through envy gave birth to one of the most despotic and tyrannical ideologies which swept destruction across the face of the earth. Communist ideology sought to hinder the upper class, and those who were further ahead, and to exalt the lower class, the workers and the farmers. They sought to make everybody *uniformly* equal, in that everybody would uniformly have the same amount of everything, *despite* their talents and capabilities. This is part of the eschatological doctrine of Communism, which is the state of Utopia, where everybody would be the same, everybody would be equal, very much similar to the social ideology espoused today by the left.

According to evolution, biological evolution would be followed by societal evolution, during which different revolutions would depose capitalism and imperialism. This of course is nothing more than daydreaming since members of the atheist Communist parties worldwide simply took over the place of the king and the nobility which they had deposed. We could also mention of all people, a worker's revolt against the Communist party in East Germany. Or how Communists regularly hounded down and brutalized kulaks, who were certain members of the well-to-do Hungarian peasantry who had larger lands, and were better off than the peasantry in general.

Communism represented big government to the extreme where the one-party government system decided everything. They did away with monopolies and competition and made everybody accept a single brand of everything, which weren't the best quality. Since the Communist system was all about a working society, it was unimaginable if someone was unemployed. Thus, the system went to great lengths to find work for an unemployed individual, even if it meant sweeping roads or other, very simple jobs. People were never fired, which allowed them to become lazy, and obnoxious to customers, a mentality which carried over to the post-Communist era. I remember an incident when a ticket seller happened to be obnoxious to my mother at a train station, who rightfully scolded her back. Communism also did away with private property. Everybody owned everything, thus some wily people imagined that if that was so, then they could take some of the public property home. Dozens of stories abound where people stole things from factories or other public facilities.

The Communists often tried to implement 5 year plans where they set certain goals, such as a set number of household appliances that they had to manufacture. In order to meet these sometimes unrealistic goals, they sped up production, thereby producing large quantities of bad products. I remember a friend telling me of someone riding a Trabant (a Communist brand car with an outer casing made of plastic) at low speeds into a tree, whereby the car fell apart. Mismanagement was rampant. Trying to manage how a whole nation of people should live and work is impossible due to the exponentially high number of parameters the government has to take into consideration, who is disconnected from the general populace. This kind of mismanagement led to the infamous famine in the Ukraine in the 1930's where 5 million people starved to death despite the Ukraine being the bread basket of the Soviet Union.

Communism and the church

The mortal enemy of the atheist Communist party was the church. Let there be no mistake about this; the goal of Communism was to completely eradicate and liquidate the church. This is because in the so-called imperialist system the church supported the king and declared that the king's power was from God. In order to dismantle the imperialist system, the church absolutely had to go. If you were the son or daughter of a pastor, you were not allowed to get a higher education. Churches were closed, and church property was taken away. Some churches were even blown up with explosives. In post-Communist Hungary for example, massive amounts of infrastructure were given back to different church denominations. Theistic religion was outlawed, and religious people were mocked, chided, and belittled openly for their belief in God. Pogroms were also held in the Soviet Union during Stalin's reign, where Jews were banished. Spies were sent into churches to watch movements within the church to alert the Communist party of a possible "clerical reaction". Members of Bible studies who went on day trips were only confident to start singing church songs only far away in the forest, out of earshot. Bibles had to be smuggled into the country.

Pastors and leaders in the church were often beaten (like the grandfather of one of my Reformed pastors in Hungary), sent to Siberia, or even executed. Richard Wurmbrand writes in his book "Tortured for Christ" that in the Communist prisons there were three classes of prisoners: common criminals, people who were former members of Nazi or Fascist governments, and members of the church, who were treated the most harshly of all three classes. Just some of the things that Richard Wurmbrand describes in his book that were done to him included slitting his throat, getting kicked in the face, having him sign a declaration that he was a homosexual, and having prison guards urinate into his open mouth. Other than that Communist tactics included determining which Biblical texts pastors had to preach from. Another tactic was to send new pastors to such isolated communities so as to minimize the effect they could have on other people. Even though they allowed the church to perform some acts of humanitarian aid, proselytizing was absolutely forbidden. I should also mention the case of the 40 Reformed pastors who wrote an open letter to Joseph Stalin to repent of his evil deeds. These 40 pastors were taken to Siberia, not to be heard of again.

But then again, there were miracles, and signs of God's providence in those times. One of my pastors in Hungary tells about how a pastor was sent to live in a house in the middle of nowhere near the Black Sea which didn't have a roof. They had nothing, and were starving. Then, similar to Elijah and the birds, a wolf came out of the forest to the pastor and his wife with a loaf of bread in his jaws. God provided in the Old Testament, God provides today. Another little known fact is that despite all of the Communists efforts to stamp out theistic religion, Joseph Stalin's own daughter came to faith in the middle of the harshest Communist oppression.

Communism and oppression

The old saying that says power corrupts, but absolute power corrupts absolutely cannot be more true than in the case of Communism. Communism was a totalitarian one-party system, with a dictator leading the Communist party. Their word and rule was absolute, and opposition was absolutely intolerable. The Communists determined everything. To say anything against the dictator or the rulers of the party was equal to risking your life. You could even risk your life as a composer if you made music which did not fit the fancy of the elite members of the Communist party. There is an anecdote of a young

boy reporting an old man to the Communist police saying that he had called Stalin a nasty name, because he had been offended by the old man. The old man was severely punished.

The Communists were paranoid about letting any kind of imperialist influence creep in behind the Iron Curtain. Traveling abroad was very limited; all sorts of cultural influences coming in from the West were blocked off. My own grandfather, a professor in linguistics was harassed by the Communists after coming back from giving a series of lectures in Ann Arbor, Michigan. They asked people who they met, what did they talk about, what kind of dealings they had with them. The Communists didn't want any kind of imperialist influence to take hold, a system that they had fought against so hard in a series of revolutions. It was a sort of paranoia. I remember one anecdote an older biologist told me about a Soviet "biologist" called Trofim Lysenko, who controlled Soviet science for 30 years. This man actually met Lysenko who was investigating bulls in a stall. He asked Lysenko whether he would examine the bull's semen under a microscope for quality control. Lysenko refused the idea saying that the microscope was "an imperialist invention".

The Communist party was capable of keeping the general populace under its thumb through a network of spies, secret informants, popularly called *besugo*, or "whisperers" in Hungarian. Around 10,000 informants were active in Hungary during Communism. These people were responsible for watching the general populace and alerting higher ups in the secret police about suspicious people. Gyula Horn and Peter Medgyessy, both Socialist prime ministers after the fall of Communism were members of the secret police. The general setup was that for example on a ship or in an apartment complex there were two informant: one's identity was known to everybody, but the other one was unknown. Since the general populace understood that there were secret spies everywhere, reporting people to the secret police, people became very drawn back and secretive. It changed the character of whole nations. You didn't want the informants to catch you saying something negative against the state, or that you had connections with imperialist groups, or your views on God. I remember one time after becoming a Christian I tried witnessing to a man on the train who was around 70 years old, who had obviously lived through Communism. I asked him whether he believed in God. His reaction was to withdraw and state that he never talks about these things. This had happened at least 10 years after the fall of Communism.

Informants were active in the church as well, to observe the activities of members of the church. Richard Wurmbrand writes in his book that there were four classes of pastors in the church. The first was in prison. The second barely was able to evade the secret police. The third caved in and succumbed to the Communists. The last – and the most despicable lot, the Judas priests were made up of pastors who actively played along with the Communists – wolves in the midst of the flock of sheep who they were supposed to protect.

After the fall of Communism a procedure was sorely called for on the part of some of the right wing parties called "illumination". This involved examining a person's past to uncover to what extent a person could possibly have been involved in the former Communist party. This procedure has never been satisfactorily done in Hungary, only a small fraction of the identities of secret informants was ever made public. A large number of people still live in Hungary today who made other peoples' lives impossible due to their spy activities. Some of them have passed away, but others still have been found out in indirect ways, I myself know of such a man who was a secret informant for the former regime.

The Revolution of 1956 will stand as an unforgettable memory in the minds of Hungarians. This was a courageous revolution by the common people during the darkest periods of Communism against a

tyrannical government which had taken away their freedom. It was started by college students, the young intelligentsia of the nation. What was remarkable was that all throughout the revolution no looting occurred, because the nation was focused on a much more noble goal. Nikita Hruschov ordered tanks to roll in from the Soviet Union into major Hungarian cities to crush the Revolution. Imagine young students standing face to face with Soviet tanks, armed only with hand-made explosives. A friend of mine in Hungary told me about how students poured soapy water down a street, thereby halting the advance of a tank uphill. Large masses of people were punished or executed who took part in the Revolution afterwards. Many people fled to the West. Hungarian communities emerged in Western countries, forming a sort of diaspora, reaching several million in number.

In order to get a feel for how people were oppressed during the Communist system, if they ever get the chance, go to the House of Terror at Andrassy street 60 in Budapest. This is a museum which vividly depicts the histories of Fascism and Communism, and was the former headquarters of the Hungarian secret service, the Allamvedelmi Osztaly (AVO). During Communism people walking down Andrassy street would often cross over to the side opposite the headquarters when passing by. Some of the methods of Inquisition-like torture are on display for visitors to see. Hangings were carried out in these dungeons up until 1985.

The aftermath of Communism

I moved to Hungary in 1993, 3-4 years after the “fall” of Communism. People talked about the Communism as “those 40 years”, or “the former system”. Hungary was beginning to become a free society once more. All sorts of Western cultural influences were coming in, Hollywood movies, rock songs, McDonald’s, and Nike shoes. People started learning English instead of Russian in schools.

Technically, Communism and the Communists never really went away. The Poles executed their Communists, but this never happened in Hungary for certain reasons. As mentioned previously, illumination was never performed in a satisfactory manner, therefore in Hungary a lot of Communist politicians hung around and found jobs in a dozen newer political parties. The modern Hungarian Socialist Party is a direct descendent of the old Communist party which has never fully and satisfactorily severed its ties with that party.

Even shortly after the fall of Communism, many people expressed their dissatisfaction with capitalism and democracy, especially elderly people. I could hardly believe my ears hearing them say things like that, when democracy stands for the government by the people. During Communism people were used to have the government lead the way, and this also meant that they always had jobs, which although it wasn’t much, but they made a living. Except that this way, they traded their freedom for stability. Furthermore, nobody really felt the impetus to excel, or to reach their full human potential. During Communism many people lived in drab colored steel-concrete apartment building complexes in huge city districts. If you had a cheap car, like a Trabant, a Lada, or a Skoda, you were lucky. For entertainment you had beer and watched the soccer games on TV. Masses of people like this were easy to manipulate. When freedom came around many people weren’t used to doing everything by themselves for their own profit without having big brother breathing down your neck.

Two generations grew up under atheist Communist ideology. This slowly eroded the church. If people held to their religion at all, they got their babies baptized in secret for fear of it being known to the public. Thus, fewer and fewer people had any connection to the church at all. About 5 years ago a newspaper article stated that only around 10% of the Hungarian populace regularly attend church, and this number is steadily decreasing. Hungary is getting more and more secular day by day.

Health care was also socialized, which was a remnant of the Communist era. Although health care was free, the cost was covered by high taxes. There were at times very long lines for being taken care of. The quality of health coverage was also low, a number of people went to cities in neighboring countries such as Vienna to get better health care. Hospitals were also under-equipped, leaving people with small choice between bad quality options, often having to wait for care for a long time.

Communism in the West

There are similar socio-economic tendencies happening in Western countries which happened during Communism. Just to summarize:

Communism	Liberalism
Envy of the upper class by workers	Class warfare
Classless society (Utopia)	Equality movement
One party system	Big government
Eradication of Christianity and theistic religion	Religion forced out of the public sphere
Communist ideology in schools	Secular liberal public schools
No firearms permitted	Anti-gun lobby
"Everyone had a job"	Welfare
Communist propaganda	Left wing media domination
No private property	Redistribution of wealth
Government health care	Socialized medicine

Summary and conclusion

Basically, people in the West are just naïve about Communism. They want to give a failed ideology one last chance at success, believing that if they are just optimistic enough, then it will work. It failed in the Soviet Union, in the Eastern Block, in Cuba, and in the Far East. The memorial of 100 million dead plus the wreckages that the Communist ideologies made of whole countries should be enough to frighten anybody away of repeating such a failed experiment.

Power corrupts, but absolute power corrupts absolutely.

If we do not learn from history, we shall be doomed to repeat it.

NEVER FORGET.