

What is Communism?

Before we answer the question, "What is Communism?" it may be good to first compare it to communism with a small "c." The system of thought called communism is an ideology summarized in the neat-sounding maxim, "From each according to his ability, to each according to his need." A study of communism could lead one into the fascinating and divergent attempts throughout history by groups to walk in the light of the above principle -- attempts both secular and religious, some benign and some malignant.

Like the big elephant examined by the group of blind men in the old Indian story, our understanding of communism would vary greatly depending on which portion of the beast we touch. But if we think of communism as that bulky beast of the jungle with many strange parts, Communism with a capital "C" would be the tusk- perceived as a sharp and dangerous spear by its fearful examiner.

Modern day Communism is based on the writings of two German economists, Karl Marx and Fredrich Engels, who answered the question "What is Communism?" in their collaboration, "The Communist Manifesto" published in 1848. In it they declare that many problems in society are due to the unequal distribution of wealth. To bring about happiness and prosperity for all, the distinctions between the rich and poor of society must be eliminated. And since the rich will never give up their goods or status voluntarily, a rebellion of the poor -- the working class -- is necessary.

Thus, Communism is a **distinct socio-political philosophy that is willing to use violent means to attain its goal of a classless society.** If capitalism is defined as a social system based on individual rights (and individual wealth), then communism is its direct opposite. Communism believes in equality through force. In its system, individual rights are ground to powder and used to build its idol of absolute government control. It is indeed like the tusk of the elephant. It is sharp. It is dangerous. And it has gored millions of men in its rage through history.

Communism embraces atheism and dismisses religion as "the opiate of the masses," a system designed by the rich and powerful to keep the poor in their place.

But Communism's quest for a classless society is bound to fail. As Frank Zappa, '60s rock star, succinctly said, "Communism doesn't work because people like to own stuff." Furthermore, someone has to hold the money bag even in a communist-style society. And whoever holds the bag becomes not only a target for those looking on but for the subtle interior demons of pride, avarice, and self-preservation.

If there will always be the poor, then there will always be the rich. There will always be division, the haves and the have-nots, and any attempt to establish a classless society this side of heaven, particularly through the violent and godless ways of Communism, is destined to frustration and failure.