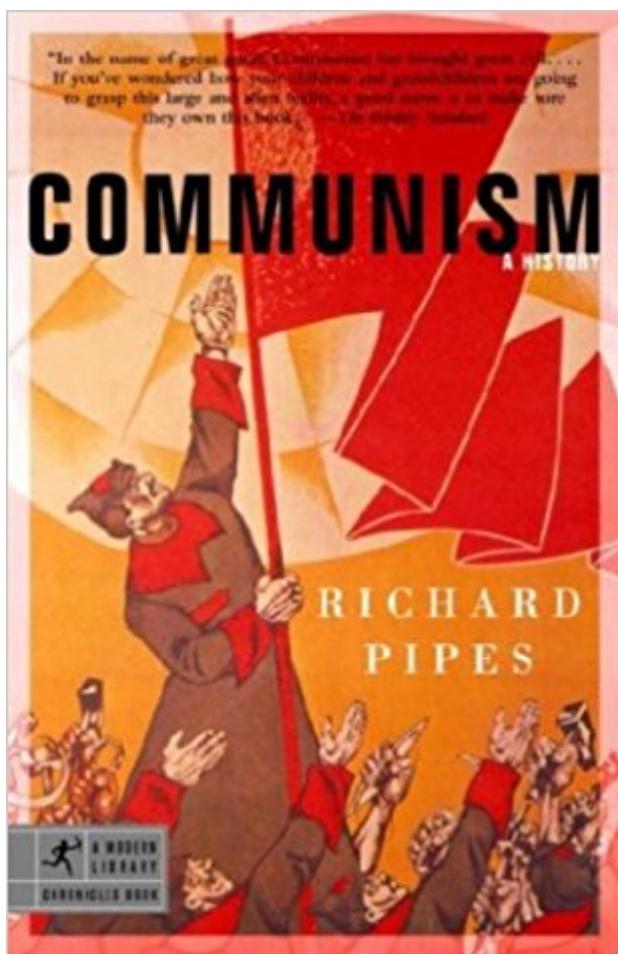


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Communism: A History (Modern Library Chronicles)



Synopsis

With astonishing authority and clarity, Richard Pipes has fused a lifetime's scholarship into a single focused history of Communism, from its hopeful birth as a theory to its miserable death as a practice. At its heart, the book is a history of the Soviet Union, the most comprehensive reorganization of human society ever attempted by a nation-state. This is the story of how the agitation of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, two mid-nineteenth-century European thinkers and writers, led to a great and terrible world religion that brought down a mighty empire, consumed the world in conflict, and left in its wake a devastation whose full costs can only now be tabulated.

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Customer Reviews

As Harvard University professor Richard Pipes shows in *Communism: A Brief History*, the tragedy of Communism is that its history was anything but brief. For most of the 20th century, it held much of the globe in its fatal grip: The utopian ideology is responsible for nearly 100 million deaths, which is 50 percent more than the number of people killed in the two world wars combined. "Communism was not a good idea that went wrong; it was a bad idea," writes Pipes, who is also the author of *The Russian Revolution* and *Property and Freedom*. This compelling little book is a devastating critique of Marxism, Leninism, Stalinism, and everything else that fits under the awful rubric of Communism. It begins by tracing Communism's philosophical origins (it has antecedents in Plato) and then

outlines the writings of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Next comes the story of why Communism took root in Russia and not the industrial West, where Marx himself believed it would sprout (answer: the traditions of property rights and the rule of law were too strong). Even in Russia, Communism was not the product of popular demand (in fact, it has never been the product of popular demand anywhere). Instead, it was a top-down revolution imposed on the whole country by a small minority of elites, led by Lenin. The Communists claimed to represent workers, but few workers were actually a part of their movement. Thus, "the Communists had to rule despotically and violently; they could never afford to relax their authority." And they were capable of incredible cruelty: "The so-called purges of the 1930s were a terror campaign that in indiscriminate ferocity and number of victims had no parallel in world history." In 1937 and 1938, for instance, the Soviet rulers of Russia executed an average of 1,000 people per day; the tsarist regime they supplanted, which was often criticized as inhumane, executed less than 4,000 people for political crimes over an 85-year period. Though Pipes appropriately spends much time discussing the Soviet Union, he also examines Communism's reception in the West and in developing countries. The book is a concise tour de force. As the cold war fades into history, it is critical not to forget the monstrous legacy of Communism, whose horrible record Pipes lays out on these pages. This is a magnificent book, a wonderful primer on a topic whose importance is difficult to overstate. --John Miller --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This opinionated introduction to communism would be better subtitled "requiem for a misguided ideology." Pipes (The Russian Revolution) focuses much of the book on his own field of specialty the rise and fall of the Soviet Union. The Harvard historian is at his best here, providing a thorough account of the ascendancy of the Russian party in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in accessible and at times eloquent prose: "Soviet totalitarianism thus grew out of Marxist seeds planted on the soil of tsarist patrimonialism." Part of the Modern Library's series on world history, the book details Soviet atrocities, emphasizing how Communist agricultural policies not only suppressed human rights but led to famines that killed millions of Soviet citizens. The sections on communism in other countries are much shorter and not as strong, particularly the discussion of Chile, in which Pipes fails to address the involvement of the United States in the 1973 coup that overthrew Socialist leader Salvador Allende. Throughout this volume, Pipes, a longtime Cold Warrior who served as Reagan's National Security Council adviser on Soviet and East European affairs, is on a mission to prove that communism's egalitarian impulses run contrary to human nature. Whether or not they agree with Pipes's views, students and general readers alike will benefit

from this concise, insightful work. (Sept.)Forecast: The book is certain to be widely taught in its field and will be promoted in a brochure mailing to historians but a three-city author tour and series advertising in the New York Times Book Review, the Chronicle of Higher Education and Lingua Franca should help the book find a more general though learned readership as well. Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This excellent book delves into communism and its history in the 20th century with particular attention given to its practice in the Soviet Union. It is evident that the author is well versed in its origin and history. Many westerners think of communism as a monolithic movement and belief system. The author does a good job in dispelling this idea by pointing out the similarities and differences and the often contentions between the different countries that practice them. It is a relatively easy and informative read, especially to those who have a desire to better understand what Communism is and more details and facts surrounding its practice last century.

Pipes does a good job pointing out the glaring inconsistencies within communist ideology in both practice and application. He maintains that it is a myth that communism was a good idea in the first place, maintaining that it is a utopian ideal that would never work without a subjugation of the masses and of individual liberties. His synopsis of the Russian Revolution is good, but he himself points out that many of his conclusions differ from Sheila Fitzpatrick, whose own *The Russian Revolution* provides a more nuanced but equally laconic approach to the subject. I am currently reading the Fitzpatrick, having finished Pipes'. I actually think they are both excellent works on the topic, and both have their merits. I do believe that Fitzpatrick's approach is more nuanced, but I do enjoy Pipes' hard-hitting and humorous style. He does not mince words. For those looking for a brief introduction to a complex subject, this book is a good place to start. The focus is on Russia, but he does explore other Marxist states: Cambodia, China, Cuba, and so forth. I enjoyed the introduction most of all, as he explores Plato, Christianity, Thomas More, and other early influences behind the communist ideal. A solid and readable overview of an important subject.

Richard Pipes' exploration of Communism offers invaluable insight into how it was applied, its shortcomings and flaws, how it led to catastrophe. An excellent book for anyone interested in learning more about Communism, as well as its consequences.

Excellent overview of the history and essence of Communism. Not an in-depth study, but it does not pretend to be. An updated version would be nice, if someone could step into Pipes' shoes

I find it was a good read and informed the reader greatly on the subject. If you are more pro communism it may have a bias against it.

nice companion to gulag a history. short read packed with information. an excellent starter into the discussion of communism in russia.

Bought it for my daughter and now she gets it. She says it is very lucid

Concise and comprehensive, Richard Pipes' "Communism: A History" is extremely well-written and actually enjoyable to read-----not at all dry like so many others of this genre. Whether you are just beginning to learn of the evils of communism or are already well-versed and looking for an overview, this book is well worth your time. Definitely recommended.

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