



*Top image:* Children are indoctrinated in communist ideology as Chinese Young Pioneers. *Bottom left:* In 1966, Richard Wurmbrand stripped to the waist before a US Senate sub-committee to show the scars caused by torture inflicted on him in a communist Romanian prison. *Bottom centre:* Communist propaganda from the Soviet Union stating, 'Under the leadership of the great Stalin — Forward to Communism!'. *Bottom right:* Propaganda showing Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin and Mao stating, 'Long live Marxism and Mao Zedong thought!'

# COMMUNISM IS NOT DEAD

*Although communism collapsed in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union about three decades ago, its global influence continues to threaten and oppress God's people today.*

Communism was upheld as an answer to corruption and greed that would eliminate conflict between the classes, or “the exploitation of one part of society by the other”. In theory, it would create a utopian paradise on earth. In practice, however, it was what VOM founder Richard Wurmbrand — who spent 14 years in communist prisons for his faith — called the “principal enemy”.

When Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels published *The Communist Manifesto* in 1848 with the aim of “liberating” the working class, they wrote, “The history of all hitherto existing societies is the

history of class struggles”. They believed these class struggles could be resolved by abolishing the ownership of private property and allowing the government to manage it for public use.

In the process of obliterating class barriers, the communists also suppressed what they viewed as a major threat to their ideology — religion and the church. In one of Marx’s earlier writings, he called religion “the opium of the people”, a tool used by capitalists to suppress and deceive the working class. Marx was not alone in that belief.

Vladimir Lenin, who in 1917 led the

Bolshevik Revolution that transformed Russia into a communist state (later expanding its territory to become the Soviet Union), stated clearly his intent toward the church: “We demand complete disestablishment of the Church so as to be able to combat the religious fog with purely ideological and solely ideological weapons”. The Communist Party had become atheistic in word and deed.

This is the atheistic communism that Richard Wurmbrand experienced when the Soviet Union occupied his Romanian homeland in 1944. After being ransomed out of communist Romania and arriving

*“Capitalism might have its evils, but it gives to the church the liberty to work at the salvation of souls. Communism ... uproots religion.” —Richard Wurmbrand*

in the West, he boldly spoke out about communism's effects on Christians and Christianity:

"I cannot agree with what even well-known evangelists and mission directors are saying; that the principal foe today is the materialism of the West. Today, the principal enemy is communism. Capitalism might have its evils, but it gives to the church the liberty to work at the salvation of souls. Communism ... uproots religion. The missionary energies must be concentrated upon the communist lands."

Although he wrote these words in 1969, at the peak of the Cold War, they are still relevant today. Communism has a global influence that continues to threaten and oppress God's people.

### All About Control

After the fall of communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, many of the remaining communist countries became economically unstable without the financial support of the Soviet Union. These countries therefore shifted tactics, focusing more on global economic expansion and control than on territorial and political expansion.

In the late 1970s, years prior to the collapse of Soviet communism, Deng Xiaoping had adjusted China's economic policies and begun to engage in the world economy. China continued to implement capitalist principles over the next two decades to bolster its wealth and global image, eventually joining the World Trade Organisation in 2001.

Some Western leaders thought China's international business dealings would force its government to relax restrictions on human rights, including the treatment of Christians, particularly house church Christians. But doing business with the world has not forced communist power brokers to relinquish their control over the country's citizens. As China's wealth



China's communist police raid a house church in Guangzhou.

has grown, so has the government's ability to track, monitor and control the Chinese people. Recent crackdowns on the church in China have resulted in more arrests and harassment, and Chinese believers are once again being forced 'underground'.

Similarly, in the relatively tiny and economically weak nation of Cuba, little has changed for Christians in 60 years under communism. In the words of one Cuban pastor, "The world has to understand that Cuba is still a communist country."

In 1959, Fidel Castro's communists overthrew the regime of Fulgencio Batista in Cuba. For Castro and his followers, communism was a plausible answer to the corruption and greed that had flourished in Batista's government. The revolution, however, resulted in no improvements. Cubans must still use ration books to purchase food, there is no private banking system and even doctors earn only the equivalent of about \$40 a month. In typical communist style, the government keeps a record of what each citizen owns; if a person has too much, the government confiscates it.

In addition to these economic hardships, the church in Cuba has faced ongoing persecution and harassment from the communist government. Cuban pastors have told VOM that they know the government plants spies in their



church services, hoping to catch the pastors saying something that can be used against them. One pastor said a spy confessed that he had attended church with the intent of gathering evidence against the pastor but couldn't follow through with it. Pastors are also routinely detained



Ernesto 'Che' Guevara with Fidel Castro, who overthrew Fulgencio Batista to establish communism in Cuba. Today, students in Cuba are required to bow before a statue of Che Guevara before they can obtain their diploma.

# Communism Today

Areas of the World Where Christians Are Significantly Oppressed by Communism Today



and questioned for hours or days at a time before being fined and released. Some pastors even keep a bag packed in preparation for their next interrogation.

Children of pastors are also targeted. One church leader's daughter was fired from her job in the medical profession and forced to leave the country as a way of pressuring her father — and his Christian witness — to leave Cuba. In addition, many students are refused diplomas unless they bow before a statue of Ernesto 'Che' Guevara, the Argentinian Marxist revolutionary who helped Castro overthrow the Batista government.

No legal Christian bookstores exist in Cuba, and no new church buildings have been constructed since the communist takeover in 1959. Existing churches face constant harassment, with the government cutting electricity and

water to some church buildings.

## Global Influence

While China, Vietnam, Laos and Cuba are considered some of the last communist nations, the ideology remains influential in several other nations, including India and Nepal. In India, communist groups are called Naxalites, a name originating from the town of Naxalbari in north-eastern India where an uprising occurred in the late 1960s. The Naxalites claim to represent the poorest in Indian society, especially those from a low caste or no caste in the Hindu-dominated country.

Although the Naxalites don't commonly persecute Christians, they were responsible for the 2019 murders of two Christians in separate incidents. In October, they tied an evangelist to

a tree and beheaded him for refusing, after repeated warnings, to stop sharing the gospel. VOM field leaders say Hindu extremists often pay or incite Naxalites to persecute Christians.

In Nepal, the Communist Party has existed since the 1990s. Communist Maoist guerrillas were instrumental in the Nepalese Civil War that led to the 2008 overthrow of the country's monarchy, which had ruled the Himalayan nation for more than two centuries. Maoist groups have also been known to persecute Christians, and today the Communist Party of Nepal holds seats in parliament.

In restricted nations like Eritrea and North Korea, dictatorial leaders educated in communist doctrine apply the ideology's values without a communist political party.

Eritrea's president, Isaias Afwerki, studied in China during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), absorbing Chairman Mao Zedong's strong-arm approach to governance. Upon his return to Eritrea, Afwerki founded his own Marxist revolutionary movement — the Eritrean People's Liberation Front, later renamed The People's Front for Democracy and Justice. Afwerki and his followers joined in a 30-year battle for independence from Ethiopia which resulted in defeat for Ethiopia, independence for Eritrea and a presidency for Afwerki in 1993.

While many Eritreans had looked with hope toward their new nation's government, Afwerki's totalitarian tendencies became more apparent with each passing year: he failed to ratify the constitution, cancelled presidential elections, outlawed other political parties and effectively closed the national press. In keeping with his Marxist governmental policies, he also embraced atheism.

Christians in Eritrea are harshly persecuted to this day, with some enduring imprisonment in shipping containers in extreme conditions. In June 2019, about 500 believers were arrested in multiple raids. In one raid on an underground church, authorities arrested 45 believers, including children, pregnant women and elderly people.

North Korea is unique among communist-influenced governments. While most communist countries embrace and promote atheism, North Korea upholds communist principles in a totalitarian-style government but requires worship of its country's founder, Kim Il Sung, who is venerated as a god.

After joining a communist youth organisation, Kim Il Sung underwent military and political training in the Soviet Union in the 1930s. With the help



North Korean dictator Kim Il Sung received training from the communists in the Soviet Union.

of the Soviets, specifically Joseph Stalin, Kim Il Sung formed what we know as North Korea, one of the most repressive nations in the world today. Citizens are required to worship Kim Il Sung as part of their state religion, Juche, which was created as a distortion of Christianity. For example, instead of the Ten Commandments, North Koreans are to follow the "Ten Principles", among which is this revealing statement: "We must make absolute the authority of the Great Leader comrade Kim Il Sung."

### The Last Victory

Communism is not dead. As economically-empowered communist nations strengthen and expand their global influence, their governments continue to actively persecute our Christian brothers and sisters in Christ. Contrary to the ideals of Marx and Engels, communist and communist-influenced countries around the world are rife with corruption, greed and gross social injustice.

Despite the efforts of communist nations in Eastern Europe to suppress and eradicate the church by imprisoning and torturing pastors, destroying church buildings and banning Bibles, the church simply went underground and remained faithful to Christ. Some Christians, like Richard Wurmbrand, emerged stronger, calling out the evils of the atheistic communist system while emphasising the urgency to win communists for Christ.

Christians in communist and communist-influenced countries live and act in that same spirit today.

Christians are standing firm today in Cuba, where pastors submit to police interrogations only to resume their ministry when they are released, and believers sacrifice their careers and social standing for the sake of Christ. In Eritrea, Christians imprisoned in shipping containers continue to share the gospel with fellow prisoners. In North Korea, Christians quietly and carefully lead others to faith in Christ, knowing it could lead to imprisonment or death.

During a television interview in Australia in 1970, Richard Wurmbrand was asked if communism was a threat to the church in Australia. "Not the church of Christ," he replied. "Even the gates of hell cannot prevail against her. It is communism which is rather endangered by the existence of the church, because the last victory is ours."

*"We don't tremble before communism. They should be in panic because of us."*

The faithful witness of our brothers and sisters in Christ causes panic and fear within communist governments. These courageous believers know that their promise of an eternal kingdom far outweighs any suffering they may endure under the godless agenda of a temporal kingdom. While their witness inspires us to stand with them and reach out to our neighbours with the gospel, may our knowledge of communism's atheistic roots and agenda keep us vigilant in prayer and action.

For the latest news from the persecuted church, visit [vom.com.au](http://vom.com.au)