

COMMUNISM

Communism is a classless society (no social classes) in which all property is owned by the community as a whole and where all people have access to equal social and economic status. As a political movement, communism is intended to overthrow capitalism (privately owned businesses and free markets) through a workers' revolution and redistribute the wealth to the workers.

Communist ideas have existed since ancient times. Primitive humans, living in tribes, worked for the benefit of their entire clan and shared the fruits of their labor.

The ideas of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, found in their *Communist Manifesto*, changed communism into a groundbreaking movement. Marx and Engels claimed Communism did not have to occur in isolated communities, but globally.

From the communist point of view, the capitalists who controlled business production took advantage of the workers by paying low wages and keeping the profits to themselves. In other words, workers had to work to meet their own needs and those of the ruling class taking advantage of them. Marx thought it was only a matter of time before the working classes of the world, realizing their common goals, would unite to take control from the capitalists and redistribute the wealth. The establishment of communism would be the inevitable outcome of a historical process.

Communism is sometimes also used to mean, particularly in capitalist nations, an autocratic (one person) government, run by the Communist Party, where central planning is used as a means of production and distribution. Because these types of governments have often committed human rights abuses, some regard this idea of Communism as dangerous.

Source: Adapted from "Communism" available at:
<http://encyclopedia.kids.net.au/page/co/Communism>

AUTOCRACY

An autocracy is a form of government where one person has unlimited power. One form of an autocracy is a dictatorship where a military leader secures power often through violent means. Another form of autocracy is an absolute monarchy where a person becomes the sole leader of a country by being born into a family of rulers.

A dictatorship is a government headed by a dictator. Originally a military position, the dictator had absolute power, but only for a limited time.

The term dictatorship has come to mean a government in which absolute power is centered in the hands of a dictator and sometimes his closest partners.

Dictators can come to power in a variety of ways. They can be elected, be appointed by the ruling party, or inherit their position. Some dictators have taken power using violence and are supported by the military.

The dictator generally controls the three government powers: legislative, executive and judicial.

In a dictatorship, there are no elections. Sometimes dictators can first obtain power from democratic elections, but shortly after being elected the dictator will ban all opposing parties and cancel all future elections. Though free elections will never occur under a dictatorship, sometimes dictators arrange for phony elections in an attempt to grant themselves the appearance of democracy and public support.

MONARCHY

Monarchy is a form of government in which power is held by a single person whose right to rule is based on birth (that person is born into a family of kings and queens) and who has the power to remain in office for life. The power of this sovereign, or ruler, may vary; there are absolute monarchies (a type of autocracy) and constitutional monarchies, where the monarch's power is strongly limited by a constitution that outlines a rule of law. Monarchy has existed since about 3000 BC and was often established during periods of crisis because it provided an efficient system of power.

In most countries with monarchies, the monarch serves as a symbol of strength and statehood. Many countries have strong rules against the monarch becoming involved in politics.

Since 1800, many of the world's monarchies have become republics. A republic is a form of government where the citizens elect representatives to make and pass laws. Most countries that have a monarchy have limited the monarch's power, with most having become constitutional monarchies.

In some cases, a monarchy based on birth exists, but actual power resides in the military. On several occasions throughout history, the same person has served as monarch of separate independent countries.

The rules for choosing monarchs varies from country to country. In constitutional monarchies the rule of succession is generally found in a law passed by parliament. Most European monarchies of the 21st century pass power from the oldest male and then the oldest female if no males are qualified although other constitutional monarchies allow only males to serve as monarchs. Monarchies can come to an end in several ways. There may be a revolution in which the monarchy is overthrown; or there may be a vote in which the citizens decide to form a republic. In some cases, the monarchy may be overthrown and then restored.

Source: Adapted from "Monarchy" available at:

<http://encyclopedia.kids.net.au/page/mo/Monarchy> and

"Monarchy and Kingship" available at:

<http://www.questia.com/library/politics-and-government/systems-of-government/monarchy-and-kingship>

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SOCIALISM

Socialism usually refers to an economic system where the government takes an active role in the economy and is responsible for broad economic planning in the long term and for protecting those who can be taken advantage of from any abusive characteristic of the market economy.

According to Karl Marx, who co-wrote the *Communist Manifesto*, socialism is the period between the overthrow of the rich and the development of a classless, communist society. Marx described the function of socialism as completing the process of making everyone equal, building and developing industry and farming, and defending the revolution from external attack using the military. As this process was completed, the socialist state would "wither away" in favor of the final stage of history, to the classless form of communism.

"Socialism" is a decision making structure that rests with central planners whose own goals are set by elite committees or even individual rulers.

Socialism is often considered an improvement on capitalism, a system where businesses are privately owned and there is limited government involvement.

Source: Adapted from "Socialism" available at:
<http://encyclopedia.kids.net.au/page/so/Socialism>

OLIGARCHY

Oligarchy means the rule of the few, and those few are generally the people who are richer and more powerful than the others. Because those with power in oligarchies are generally the rich in a society, oligarchies are generally bad for the poor.

People who rule in oligarchies may be elected, born into their positions, or may have a certain amount of money or land which entitles them to be a part of the ruling group.

Oligarchies are often controlled by a few powerful families whose children are raised and taught to inherit the power of the oligarchy, often at some sort of expense to those who are governed.

Oligarchies can occur in countries with other forms of government and can create change. For example, a group of wealthy people in a country may insist that their ruler, a monarch or dictator, share power. One example of this process occurred when English nobles banded together in 1215 to force a reluctant King John I of England to sign the Magna Carta, which showed recognition both of King John's decreasing political power and recognition that an oligarchy was coming into place. As English society continued to grow and develop, the Magna Carta was repeatedly revised (1216, 1217, and 1225), guaranteeing greater rights to greater numbers of people, thus setting the stage for British constitutional monarchy.

DIRECT DEMOCRACY

Democracy means the rule by the people. That is where each individual person has a vote about what to do. Whatever the most people vote for becomes the law. There is no king or tyrant, and anybody can propose a new law.

Direct democracy is a phrase that represents decisions where citizens pass laws directly, without using representatives. Each person casts their own vote for proposed laws, instead of having a representative cast a vote on their behalf. A current example of the way direct democracy is practiced is the "initiative", which allows citizens to place proposals on the ballot that become law if a majority of the electorate, or voters, votes in favor.

One problem that comes up in a direct democracy is determining who is going to be able to vote. It was much easier to allow fewer people to vote because fewer had to be taken from their regular work to vote. However, the less people that were allowed to vote, the less that the principle of "rule by the people" was practiced.

The earliest direct democracy in the world began in Athens, Greece in 510 BC, which allowed only men to vote. When democracy proved to be successful in Athens, many other city-states (cities that also served the role of nations) chose it for their government too. But most of them allowed even fewer people to vote than Athens did: most of the other city-states only allowed free adult male citizens to vote if they owned land or owned their own houses (that is, the richer people).

Another problem for direct democracies was that it was not easy for men to always be going to the meeting-place to vote. Most men had work to do such as planting their grain, making shoes, fighting wars or doing other types of work. They couldn't be always voting. So most democracies sooner or later ended up choosing a few men who would do most of the voting, and the rest only came when there was a really important vote. It was hard to decide how to choose these few men, and different cultures did it different ways. Athens did it by a lottery where every man had an equal chance to be chosen at random to vote. Those men who were chosen served for one year.

REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY

A representative democracy, or republic, is understood to be an independent state ruled by representatives of the citizens of a nation. The term republic was originally used to mean a form of government that was not based on a single ruler and but one that had popular control of the government. Today, in addition to the above characteristics, a republic is a government in which all citizens have the right to vote and in which the government's power is limited by a constitution.

A republic is different from a direct democracy in that the republic operates through a representative assembly chosen by the citizens, while in a democracy the public participates directly in governmental affairs. In actual practice, most modern representative governments are closer to a republic than a democracy.

In a republic, instead of voting directly about what they want to do, as in a democracy, people instead vote for people to represent them, and those people decide what to do.