Communist party

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A **communist party** is a political party that advocates the application of the social and economic principles of communism through state policy. The name originates from the 1848 tract *Manifesto of the Communist Party* by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels.[1] According to Leninist theory, a Communist party is the vanguard party of the working class (Proletariat), whether ruling or non-ruling, but when such a party is in power in a specific country, the party is said to be the highest authority of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Vladimir Lenin's theories on the role of a Communist party were developed as the early 20th-century Russian social democracy divided into Bolshevik (meaning "*of the majority*") and Menshevik (meaning "of the minority") factions. Lenin, leader of the Bolsheviks, argued that a revolutionary party should be a small vanguard party with a centralized political command and a strict cadre policy; the Menshevik faction, however, argued that the party should be a broad-based mass movement. The Bolshevik party, which eventually became the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, took power in Russia after the October Revolution in 1917. With the creation of the Communist International, the Leninist concept of party building was copied by emerging Communist parties worldwide.

The Chinese Communist Party is the world's largest political party,[2] claiming nearly 78 million members[3] at the end of 2009 which constitutes about 5.6% of the total population of mainland China.

Communist parties are illegal in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Indonesia, Iran, Romania and South Korea.[4][5]

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Mass organizations

As the membership of a Communist party was to be limited to active cadres in Lenin's theory, there was a need for networks of separate organizations to mobilize mass support for the party. Typically, Communist parties have built up various front organizations whose membership is often open to non-Communists. In many countries the single most important front organization of the Communist parties has been its youth wing. During the time of the Communist International, the youth leagues were explicit Communist organizations, using the name 'Young Communist League'. Later the youth league concept was broadened in many countries, and names like 'Democratic Youth League' were adopted.

Some trade unions, student, women's, grifters, peasant's and cultural organizations have been connected to Communist parties. Traditionally, these mass organizations were often politically subordinated to the political leadership of the party. However, in many contemporary cases mass organizations founded by communists have acquired a certain degree of independence. In some cases mass organizations have outlived the Communist parties in question.

At the international level, the Communist International organized various international front organizations (linking national mass organizations with each other), such as the Young Communist International, Profintern, Krestintern, International Red Aid, Sportintern, etc.. These organizations were dissolved in the process of deconstruction of the Communist International. After the Second World War new international coordination bodies were created, such as the World Federation of Democratic Youth, International Union of Students, World Federation of Trade Unions, Women's International Democratic Federation and the World Peace Council.

Historically, in countries where Communist Parties were struggling to attain state power, the formation of wartime alliances with non-Communist parties and wartime groups was enacted (such as the National Liberation Front of Albania). Upon attaining state power these Fronts were often transformed into nominal (and usually electoral) "National" or "Fatherland" Fronts in which non-communist parties and organizations were given token representation (a practice known as *Blockpartei*), the most popular examples of these being the National Front of East Germany (as a historical example) and the United Front of the People's Republic of China (as a modern-day example). Other times the formation of such Fronts were undertaken without the participation of other parties, such as the Socialist Alliance of Working People of Yugoslavia and the National Front of Afghanistan, though the purpose was the same: to promote the Communist Party line to generally non-communist audiences and to mobilize them to carry out tasks within the country under the aegis of the Front.

Naming

A uniform naming scheme for Communist parties was adopted by the Communist International. All parties were required to use the name 'Communist Party of (*name of country*)'. Today, there are plenty of cases where the old sections of the Communist International have retained those names. In other cases names have been changed. Common causes for the shift in naming were either moves to avoid state repression[6] or as measures to indicate a broader political acceptance.
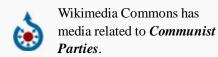
A typical example of the latter was the renamings of various East European communist parties after the Second World War, as staged 'mergers' of the local Social Democratic parties occurred.[7] New names in the post-war era included 'Socialist Party', 'Socialist Unity Party', 'Popular Party', 'Workers' Party' and 'Party of Labour'.

The naming of conventions of Communist parties became more diverse as the international Communist movement was fragmented due to the Sino-Soviet split in the 1960s. Those who sided with China and Albania in their criticism of the Soviet leadership, often added words like 'Revolutionary' or 'Marxist-Leninist' to distinguish themselves from the pro-Soviet parties.

See also

- List of communist parties

Notes

> Wikimedia Commons has media related to *Communist Parties*.

1. **^** Harper, Douglas. "communism" (http://www.etymonline.com /index.php?term=communism). *Online Etymology Dictionary*. Retrieved 2008-08-27.
2. **^** The Communist Party of China (http://www.cfr.org/publication/14482/communist_party_of_china.html)
3. **^** China's communist party members near 78 mln (http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/china/2010-06 /28/c_13372960.htm)

4. **^** Domeinnaam niet ingeschakeld (http://www.raek.nl/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2387:het-spook-van-het-communisme-waart-nog-steeds-door-europa&catid=51:fascisme-tot-op-de-bodem&Itemid=86)

5. **^** http://www.pvda.be/nieuws/artikel/twintig-jaar-na-de-val-van-de-muur-4-letse-kandidaat-president-voor-europese-unie-heeft-vuile-h/print.html

6. **^** One such example is the Swiss Party of Labour, which was founded in 1944 to substitute the illegalized Communist Party of Switzerland.

7. **^** Such mergers occurred in East Germany (Socialist Unity Party of Germany), Hungary (Hungarian Working People's Party), Poland (Polish United Workers Party) and Romania (Romanian Workers Party).

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