

# THE SINGING REVOLUTION



**Subjects:** History / Economics

## **Evaluating Political Economies: What Does Communism Look Like?**

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### **Aim / Essential Question**

How does the concept/definition of communism match the reality of what communism is, according to those who have lived through it?

### **Overview**

The concept of communism seems, to some, to be a workable theory. Life under communist rule, however, has led to meager living conditions, at best. Tiia-Ester Loitme explains the reality of communism, based on her own experiences during the Stalinist occupation of Estonia.

### **Materials & Technology**

- Tiia-Ester Loitme: Conductor, Deported at Age 14 video clip (from Disc Two / Section 1: 1939-1956: The Soviet & Nazi Occupations / Deportation Stories)
- Slide show presentation. The slides can also be printed and distributed to the students (from [www.izzit.org](http://www.izzit.org))
- Class set of Definition of Communism handout (below)
- Any DVD-compatible player that will allow distinct chapters to be shown
- A television or video projection unit
- Computer with projection capability

**Lesson Time:** One 50-minute class period.

### **Objectives**

Students will:

- Compare and contrast the perception and reality of communism.
- Analyze the reality of a communist command economy.
- Evaluate why the Stalinist communist system resorted to using force and intimidation to implement a system of shared wealth and a classless society.

### **Instruction**

**Opening:** Bell Ringer / Do Now

Before showing the video clip, distribute the Definition of Communism handout. Ask your students to imagine life under communism. Have students complete the “Before” sections of the handout, focusing on what a communist society would look like based on the definitions.

### **Activities**

1. After the students create their own lists, develop a class list of features they believe a communist society would have. Be sure to get students to explain why they think each feature would exist in a communist society.
2. Show the video clip from Disc 2, 1939-1956: The Soviet & Nazi Occupations; Deportation stories; Tiia-Ester Loitme: Conductor, Deported Age 14 (9:53).

3. Use the slide show presentation to review Tiia-Ester Loitme's description of life under the Stalinist regime. (The slide show is optional, as the video addresses all the issues in the lesson. The slide show acts as a review of the interview and allows the students more time to view Tiia-Ester Loitme's comments.)
4. Compare the students' lists of what life should look like under communism to Ms. Loitme's description of life as it really was under communism.

**Close:** Application / Summary

Engage the students in a conversation about the "simple things in life" such as the smell of vanilla ice cream or a heated bedroom in the winter. Have them revisit their answers on the Definition of Communism handout. Based on the story of Tiia-Ester Loitme, ask students to create a new list based on her experience. Compare the before and after lists and ask the students to compare and contrast the perception and reality of communism.

**Homework**

Answer the following questions:

- How does the reality of the communist system match the definition of a classless society where ownership of society is ascribed to the people? How do they differ?
- Has your perception of communism changed as a result of Ms. Loitme's story? Write a letter that you would send to Ms. Loitme to explain your views of communism, and why your views have or have not changed.
- Why do you think a simple pleasure such as vanilla ice cream would not be readily available? If the people own the means of production and they like ice cream, why wasn't ice cream produced?

**Optional:** Read and discuss "1940-55 Personal Memories: Fate of Estonian President Pats' Family" and/or "1942 The Fate of Professor Ants Piip." These stories show the brutality and oppression of life in the communist system under Stalin and the reality of life in Estonia.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Class \_\_\_\_\_ Period \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher \_\_\_\_\_

## Definition of Communism

“Plato supposed communism...to be an ideal social arrangement. Jesus told his disciples to sell all that they owned and give the proceeds to the poor. Through the ages, little sects more numerous than anyone can count have embraced some form of communism as the basis of their utopian communities. John Lennon’s immensely popular, visionary song ‘Imagine’ includes the line, ‘imagine no possessions, it’s easy if you try.’” – Robert Higgs

### Definitions:

- **A theory or system of social organization based on the holding of all property in common, actual ownership being ascribed to the community as a whole or to the state.** (dictionary.com)
- **Advocacy of a classless society in which private ownership has been abolished and the means of production and subsistence belong to the community.** (thefreedictionary.com)
- **A final stage in Marxist theory in which the state has withered away and economic goods are distributed equitably.** (merriam-webster.com)

What do you think the following would look like in communist society? Use the form below to describe what communism should look like based on the definitions provided. Try to imagine what kinds of goods and services you would see in a communist society based on the quote from Robert Higgs and the definitions provided. Be prepared to defend why you think society would look the way you envision.

<b>Housing</b>	<b>Restaurants</b>	<b>Entertainment</b>	<b>Careers</b>
Before viewing video:	Before viewing video:	Before viewing video:	Before viewing video:
After viewing video:	After viewing video:	After viewing video:	After viewing video:
<b>Education</b>	<b>Social Life</b>	<b>Transportation</b>	<b>Religion</b>
Before viewing video:	Before viewing video:	Before viewing video:	Before viewing video:
After viewing video:	After viewing video:	After viewing video:	After viewing video: