

Note: This essay was written for the Core Seminar class that I took while attending Bard College's Globalization and International Affairs Program in New York (BGIA) in Spring 2010. The purpose of the assignment was to write an essay analyzing the significance of the book *"The Rise and Fall of Communism"* by Archie Brown, from an individual's perspective.

The Rise and Fall of Communism

Mr. Brown's book, ***"The Rise and Fall of Communism"***, tells the story of communism since its emergence as isolated thoughts and its concretization as an ideology through Marx's and Engels' *"The Communist Manifesto,"* continuing with its implementation in former (and current) communist states, and ending (more or less) with the fall of the Soviet communist system. It explores the reasons communism has emerged, how it thrived or survived, as well as the reasons that lead to its downfall in the former Soviet Bloc. Although the five surviving communist states are mentioned (China, Cuba, North Korea, Laos, Vietnam), the book focuses on the Soviet Union and the Eastern Europe Bloc behind the Iron Curtain, which is the author's area of expertise.

I come from one of the former communist countries in Eastern Europe, a country in which the communist regime was tougher than in most of its neighbors, being influenced by Mao's regime in China. After the First World War, Romania fell under Soviet influence. The country became communist in 1947, and the regime fell in 1989 after a relatively bloody revolution. Nevertheless, the effects of the communist rule (and of the years of transition from it) are still felt today, in the way people act, in the amount of trust they put in the political parties, in their mentalities, as well as in the country's economic situation etc.

Unfortunately, in Romania as well as in most other former communist countries, the transition period has been a hard one. Only in recent years have we managed to achieve an acceptable development level to allow the country to become part of NATO and the EU. I am part of the transition generation, and even though we haven't lived in communism, our lives have been much influenced by it. Although more and more young people achieve positions of power, these former communist countries are still ruled by people from the former generation: in some cases by people who were also in power before the regime fell. Moreover, many young people who get positions of power are sons and daughters of people who were in power before the fall of communism, political parties don't have well specified political ideologies and you can see a left wing party allying with a right wing party just in order to win the elections, and, unfortunately, corruption is still high in these states. Maybe because of this, people are generally skeptical about anyone who tries to ascend the political ladder, and they tend not to get involved in politics in order to protect themselves from disappointment. Also, there are still a lot of people who feel that their country has nothing to offer their children, and there is little hope that any of this will change soon.

Nevertheless, putting aside the political and economic aspect, Romania is as much a capitalist country as the USA is. We are a market economy, and the state doesn't get involved too much in it. People watch American movies, go to malls, eat junk food and drink sodas as much as in the States. There are few that long for the years passed, and usually the point that is made is that then you didn't have what to buy whereas now you can find almost anything but you can't afford to buy a lot. The difference, understood by most people though, is that the opportunities today are enormous (almost unlimited), while in the past they didn't exist (I wouldn't have been here in the States had the communist regime not fallen, for example).

Maybe communism hasn't influenced the way I live my life more than putting it all in perspective, but it has definitely given me an example of what I must fight against and prevent from happening again at all costs. People should read Mr. Brown's book and should learn history so that they don't become infatuated with an ideology that has nothing to offer in practice. It is the duty of people like me to influence others in such ways that they don't fall prey to the beautiful idyllic light in which Marx and others have portrayed communism. The thing that these people do not understand is that communism is not a philosophical idea, but rather a sad part of history— that that idea was applied in some parts of the world (and is still unfortunately being applied in some) with dire consequences. Real life and beautiful ideas, human nature and philosophical visions of it, they just do not match! It is impossible for me to understand how some people thought (and still think!) that mankind would naturally settle with not having anything to call their own and still have motivation to do anything... If working or not working leads to the same result, wouldn't people stop working? Isn't that obvious? A society based on such wrong understanding of human nature can only be held in place by force and terror. There is no natural advancement in that direction, there will not come the time when the governing power will dissolve and the state will continue in a communist manner— people are just not built that way. The terror leadership has to be maintained in order for people to not succumb to their natural ways. Moreover, that leadership defeats the point of the same philosophical idea— it proves that the starting premise is wrong. People will eventually rebel against such a government, as history has in fact proven.

People today should learn more history when defending such ideas, when insinuating that they were valid points... It's easy to avoid the mistakes of the past: it's just a matter of reading a history book and seeing what actually happened. Unfortunately, there are too many people willing to defend ideas and believe them, without caring about the facts behind those ideas... Equality in everything is not going to make anyone feel good about their person; equality in rights, options and possibilities to achieve something in life, yes, that is something to fight for, because that is in itself a motivation for fighting. Motivation is something everybody needs, and it's something a communist regime ultimately fails to offer. A utopian communist state is impossible to achieve, and trying to achieve it is useless and destructive, as history itself points out.