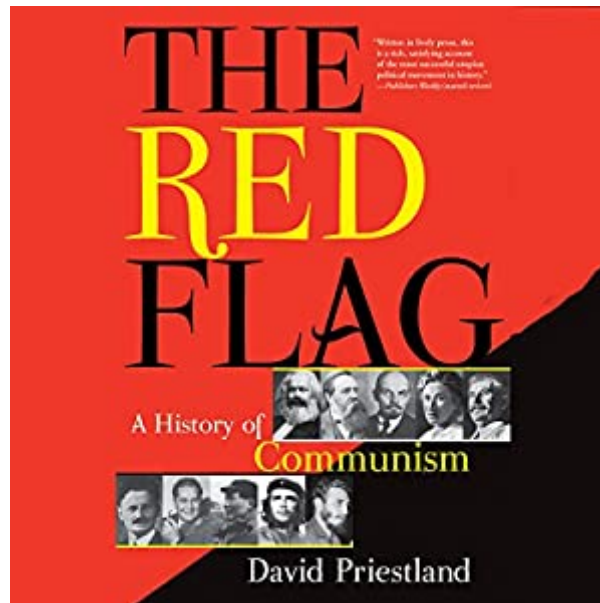




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# The Red Flag: A History Of Communism



## Synopsis

Communism was one of the most powerful political and intellectual movements the world has ever seen. At the height of their influence, Communists controlled more than a third of the Earth's surface. But perhaps more astonishing than its rapid rise and extraordinary reach was Communism's sudden, devastating collapse in November of 1989. In *The Red Flag*, Oxford professor David Priestland tells the epic story of a movement that has taken root in dozens of countries across 200 years, from its birth after the French Revolution to its ideological maturity in 19th-century Germany to its rise to dominance (and subsequent fall) in the 20th century. Beginning with the first modern Communists in the age of Robespierre, Priestland examines the motives of thinkers and leaders including Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, Castro, Che Guevara, Mao, Ho Chi Minh, Gorbachev, and many others. He also asks what it was about Communism that inspired its rank and file - whether the militants of 1920s Russia, the guerrilla fighters of China, or the students of Ethiopia - and explores the experience of what it meant to live under Communism for its millions of subjects. He shows how Communism, in all its varieties, appealed to different societies for different reasons, in some as a response to inequalities and in others more out of a desire to catch up with the West. But paradoxically, while destroying one web of inequality, Communist leaders were simultaneously weaving another. It was this dynamic, together with widespread economic failure and an escalating loss of faith in the system, that ultimately destroyed Soviet Communism itself. At a time when global capitalism is in crisis and powerful new political forces have arisen to confront Western democracy, *The Red Flag* is essential listening if we are to apply the lessons of the past to navigating the future. Cover photo of Che Guevara copyright 2015 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris.

## Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 28 hours & 49 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: Audible Studios

Audible.com Release Date: May 20, 2015

Language: English

ASIN: B00XZGYP1G

Best Sellers Rank: #127 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > History > World #158 in Books

> Audible Audiobooks > Politics & Current Events > Political History & Theory #433 in [Books](#) > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > Ideologies & Doctrines > Communism & Socialism

## Customer Reviews

As an amateur historian of the political history of the 20th Century I found this to be nearly flawless. Though perhaps not recommended as an entry level introduction to the subject, I found this history to be thorough, relatively unbiased, and engaging. My own basic familiarity with the areas covered gave me a good basis on which to judge the work myself. I would highly recommend it.

I admit that I purchased *The Red Flag* more out of a sense of duty than eagerness. I needed to better understand the history of Communism so I could explain it to my students more competently. My previous reading on the subject had been heavy on theory, and terminology like "dialectical materialism" just doesn't convey much to me. So I was delighted to find *The Red Flag* was written in a fresh, approachable style that leaves out most of the jargon while doing full justice to the drama. Beginning with the French Revolution, the author traces the development of socialism/communism through the tumultuous Napoleonic period and afterwards, focussing of course on the career of Karl Marx, then continues through the nineteenth century and the development of Leninism. In the twentieth century the story divides, primarily discussing the application of Marxism in Russia but also giving full coverage to variations in Europe, Latin America, Africa, and Asia. David Priestland's many biographical vignettes on the careers of some well known figures like Lenin and Stalin as well as less familiar names like Togliatti are interesting, and his discussions of how different varieties of Marxism like Maoism developed are illuminating without getting bogged down in unnecessary detail. Most importantly, Priestland manages to convey the excitement and idealism, the sense that a fairer, more equal society was possible, which facilitated the growth and development of communism.

I ordered this book to use as a reader for my Russian history class. I had not had a chance to preview the book first since I was on deadline and went by the reviews. My students hated it. It was very difficult for them to separate what was important with the cultural footprints the author included. I knew most of the film and musical anecdotes Priestland discussed but a casual reader of Russian history might not. My students struggled with what was significant and what wasn't. The book is not an exciting read but does a good job explaining socialism and communism and their many manifestations in the 20th century. This book is not for the casual reader but for someone with a

solid base of knowledge of Russian history and economic history.

This book is a broad introduction to communism, balancing origins and theory with global history and mini-biographies. It is a very readable book, and requires little, if any background, knowledge.

If you love reading about communism and the history behind it, then this is the book for you. The book is long but it is so interesting that the reading goes very fast. This was assigned as a college reading, but anyone who loves history will enjoy this book. I highly recommend it.

It's just a really really long book. It covers the major players as well as the minor players, and very minor players in history. Talks about minor political parties from all over Europe and what books were being published and novels, and plays at different theaters and how they all played different roles in influencing society... and on and on.

I have read approx. half of the book, I have enjoyed it, but I would like to question/argue with the author a little.

I read this book as a part of a college class and the book is quite heavy to read. However, it gives you a detailed insight into the history of communism!

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