



# Causes and Convictions



## Unit 18 Causes and convictions

### UNIT 18

## CAUSES AND CONVICTIONS

### INTRODUCTION

Using the example of a number of leaders who were inspired to take up the Communist cause, this unit explores the importance of causes and convictions in the life of a leader.

**A cause** is a project, political viewpoint, creed, charity, organisation or any initiative which incites people to support it and unites people in their support of it.

**A conviction** is an opinion or a persuasion that a particular initiative is worthy of support.

Leaders need to develop a sense of where they stand on issues.  
Remember:

**Those who stand for nothing, will fall for anything.**

### COMMUNISM

The basic principles of Communism are that property, produce and wealth should belong to the entire community and be shared, rather than be unequally distributed and most of the assets held in the hands of just a few rich people. Communists believe in a “classless” society with no social hierarchy except for a centralised dictatorship.

The expression of Communism varies from one Communist country to another, but all Communist regimes generally believe in each person working according to their capacity and receiving according to their needs.

In many places around the world, Communist ideology gained favour due to people reacting badly to an unequal distribution of their country’s wealth. These countries often experienced a revolt which saw the rejection of the rich, privileged and powerful classes in favour of a redistribution of wealth and property, so that each person had a similar amount.

### TASK

**List the names of six countries that have a Communist government today.**

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**Does Russia currently have a Communist government?**

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### Karl Marx (1818-1883) Founder of Modern Communism



Karl Marx was a political theorist and philosopher. He was born in Germany into a Jewish family, but his family converted to Christianity when he was six years of age.

At Bonn University, Marx was known as a passionate man. He was once arrested for carrying a pistol and he also fought a duel. Marx restricted himself to a small group who would talk about revolutionary politics.

Marx, and his wife Jenny, had to flee Europe and live in London because of his growing involvement in politics. In 1844, Marx neglected his studies and developed a close friendship with Friedrich Engels who was to help Marx financially and with his writings.

These writings were to form the official doctrine of many Communist countries such as the Soviet Union.

Marx subjected his family to great poverty by being very reluctant to work. This led to evictions from houses and even imprisonment, with his wife Jenny having to share a prison cell with prostitutes on one occasion.

Lacking personal discipline, self-absorbed, idle and lazy, Marx proved a difficult man to live with. Jenny caught smallpox in 1860. This scarred her and took away any lingering beauty she had. Yet some ten years before this, Marx had begun an affair with their maid, Helen Demuth, a peasant girl who was known to the Marx family as "Lenchen". They produced a son called Henry. This affair broke Jenny's heart.

The writings of Marx were powerful and inflammatory. Much of it was also angry, rambling and disjointed. Marx rarely associated with the working class and often despised them, even though he advanced their cause in his writings.

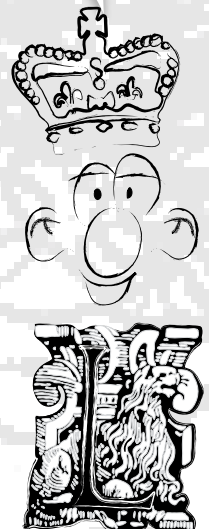
Marx argued that the working class would eventually triumph, for they were the real creators and controllers of wealth. No one could profit indefinitely from another person's labour.

Marx died in 1883 and was buried in Highgate Cemetery in London. An idealist, a theorist and a complex individual who was both brilliant and greatly flawed.

#### The most significant writings by Marx were:

- *The Communist Manifesto (1848)*
- *Das Kapital (1867-1883)*

The latter was completed by Engels after Marx died.





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### Vladimir Ilyich Lenin (1870-1924) Bolshevik Leader of Russia



Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov was born in Simbirsk, Russia on the banks of the Volga River. His father was a director of schools and his mother was a well-educated woman who could speak four languages. Yet it was Vladimir's elder brother, Sasha, whom he felt closest to. This was to prove tragic for Vladimir, for Sasha was hanged for attempting to assassinate Czar Alexander III. The bitterness Vladimir felt as a result of this hanging was only increased when he was expelled from the law school of Kazan University for attending a student protest meeting. This would have been enough to crush most people but Vladimir completed his four-year law program in one year without the help of Kazan University by studying on his own. He achieved perfect scores in all subjects examined.

Vladimir read *Das Kapital* by Karl Marx and this changed his life. The anger he felt was given an outlet. His purpose then became to make Russia Communist. Capitalism would be overthrown, the workers would triumph and everyone would share their resources rather than wealth being concentrated in the hands of a few.

However, misfortune was to overtake Vladimir again. He was sentenced to three years exile in the frozen wastes of Siberia because of his Marxist activities. The only positive in this experience was that he met and married Nadezhda Krupskaya. The couple moved to London when they were released. There they networked with other Communist revolutionaries. While in London, Vladimir met a brilliant Russian called Davidovich Bronstein, better known as Leon Trotsky.

Vladimir changed his name to "Lenin" and returned to Russia in 1900 where he gained control of the Russian Social Democratic Workers Party. As a leader, he won a crucial vote to restrict the governance of the Communist Party to an elite professional group of revolutionaries. Thereafter Lenin's followers were known as Bolsheviks, which means "the majority men". Lenin was obliged to live overseas again in 1907 because his political views had once again made him unpopular with the Russian authorities.

In March 1917, after a discouraging involvement in World War I, Russian soldiers revolted. Czar Nicholas II was overthrown and a socialist government, led by Alexander Kerensky, was established. Lenin was in Switzerland at the time but got permission to travel across Germany in a sealed train to Russia. The Germans wanted to help Lenin for they thought Lenin would destabilise Russia and therefore release pressure on the German forces fighting the Russians on the Eastern Front.

The Bolsheviks, led by Lenin and Trotsky, eventually overthrew Kerensky. The armed Bolsheviks, called Red Guards, triumphed and Lenin was installed as Russia's leader. Lenin acted quickly to make peace with Germany and take Russia out of World War I. The country's wealth was taken and redistributed by councils of workers called Soviets. This upset those who lost their wealth, and civil war broke out between the Red guards and the wealthy classes who called themselves the Whites. The civil war ended in 1921 with a victory to Lenin's Red Guards.

Lenin went on with his program of reform. All major opposition was crushed and a one-party state was established. Private property ownership was abolished and industry and agriculture was nationalised.

Lenin became weakened when shot twice by a young anarchist called Fanny Kaplan in 1918. Never recovering full health, and after suffering a series of strokes, Lenin died in 1924. The control of Russia then moved to Joseph Stalin who won the power struggle against Leon Trotsky. With great ruthlessness, Stalin brought a new era of bloodletting and change to Russia.



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**Ho Chi Minh (1890-1969)**  
Vietnamese Communist Leader



Ho Chi Minh was a remarkable man. He was born in the French colony of Vietnam to country parents. His schooling in the city of Hue was not completed because he left to teach in a fishing community and then to travel the world. He became a bus-boy in Saigon, a kitchen hand in London and a Communist in Paris.

After reading the works of Karl Marx he joined the Communist Party and became a militant. His activities included editing a Communist newspaper, meeting Lenin, Trotsky and Stalin in Moscow, and establishing a revolutionary youth organisation in China.

Ho spoke several Chinese dialects, French, German, Russian, Japanese and English. All these languages were exercised as he moved about the world advancing the Communist cause. These activities earned him the death sentence from the French and imprisonment from the Chinese for 18 months.

Ho would disguise himself as a beggar, peasant, monk or merchant. His covert activities included organising resistance to the Japanese who had taken control of Vietnam from the French in World War II.

A string of organisations were set up by Ho including the Indochinese Communist Party and the League for the Independence of Vietnam.

When Japan withdrew from Vietnam, after their surrender at the end of World War II in 1945, Ho proclaimed the independence of Vietnam. Unfortunately, not many people outside of Vietnam supported this initiative. Now calling himself Ho Chi Minh ("he who enlightens") Ho had to endure Chinese invasion from the north and re-occupation by the French in the south.

The French persuaded the Chinese to leave, but Ho Chi Minh could not persuade the French to leave. Power sharing arrangements broke down, the French sent a French naval vessel into Haiphong harbour and killed 6000 civilians who were resisting French control. War broke out again.

After many years of conflict, the French decided to draw the Viet Minh guerrillas out by establishing a stronghold in the fortress city of Dienbienphu. Smuggling Chinese canon parts to the nearby hillsides, the Viet Minh pounded the French fortress city into surrender.

Despite winning the war, Ho Chi Minh was only given control of the northern part of Vietnam. However, the French, Chinese and Russian authorities promised democratic national elections that would determine the government of the whole country in 1956. This promise was not kept, so Ho's supporters, now called the Viet Cong, began guerrilla warfare against South Vietnam.

America started supporting South Vietnam because Dwight Eisenhower feared the spread of Communism through Asia. American involvement increased; with them dropping more bombs on Vietnam than were dropped on Japan and Germany in the entire II World War. But the war dragged on and a demand for peace in Vietnam began to grow in America. Ho Chi Minh launched the Tet Offensive, an aggressive attack on American troops and South Vietnamese targets.

The new American President, Lyndon B. Johnson, agreed to stop the bombing in Vietnam, but his successor Richard Nixon continued the fight. Finally, due to great military and political pressure, America withdrew, South Vietnam was conquered by the Viet Cong and its capital, Saigon, was renamed Ho Chi Minh City.

Ho Chi Minh died on 3 September 1969, and therefore did not witness the surrender of Saigon in 1975. This humble country peasant had taken on much of the Western and Eastern world and won. He had contained the aggressive advances of China and Russia and defeated the French and the Americans.

Ho Chi Minh was an extraordinary man who was driven by the cause to free his country and to advance Communism. Extremely intelligent, single-minded and tenacious, Ho Chi Minh was one of the great revolutionaries of history.



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### BEYOND COMMUNISM

One does not need to be a Communist to develop a cause or a conviction. Take the example of Hugh Evans, Young Australian of the Year in 2004.

#### **Hugh Evans (1984- )**

*Young Australian of the Year, 2004*

- At 12 years of age, Hugh organised support for the aid organisation, World Vision. Soon his school was raising more money for World Vision than any other school in Australia.
- At 14, Hugh was sponsored by World Vision to go to the Philippines. He spent some time living in a slum built on a garbage tip called “Smoky Mountain”.
- At 15, Hugh spent a year living and working at Mother Teresa’s orphanage in India.
- A short time later, Hugh put forward a global resolution to the General Assembly of the United Nations to abolish child labour. The motion was passed.
- Before going to university, Hugh lived for a time in an HIV/AIDS orphanage near Durban in South Africa.
- Still in his teens, Hugh founded the Oaktree Foundation, a youth-run aid and development agency employing over 250 volunteers.

#### **TASK**

**Visit the Oaktree Foundation website: [www.theoaktree.org](http://www.theoaktree.org) in order to understand more about this organisation.**



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### CONCLUSION

Leaders need to develop convictions as to how things should be done and then, be prepared to support these convictions. Given that there is often a personal cost to supporting a conviction, it is wise for a leader to check, and then double check, whether their convictions are appropriate. They must examine all the facts, explore all the points of view and remove any disinformation before adopting a cause.

The exercise of looking at the history of Communism serves to illustrate to the non-Communist world, that many great and significant leaders have fought heroically for a cause which might well be at odds with our own political views. This does not diminish them as leaders, and neither does it disqualify them from inspiring young leaders today, whatever their political persuasion.