Political Systems

Political systems are instrumental in shaping the development of individual nations. These systems determine the policies that are to be followed by the government and the governed and aim to establish political stability. Their success at this, as well as their other policies, not only affect the strength of a nation, but societal contentment. The values each system embodies both reflect and influence the values of the nation where they exist. In Russia, communism has had a tremendous impact on the history of the country, while constitutional monarchy has been key to shaping the development of Great Britain.

Communism, originally proposed by Karl Marx in his Communist Manifesto, aimed to solve the mistreatment and poverty suffered by the industrial working class by creating a cooperative, classless society where all property and profit are shared equally. However, the communist ideal of peaceful societal change that would benefit everyone was not demonstrated in countries where it was implemented, the first of which was Russia (the Soviet Union). Vladimir I. Lenin introduced the idea of communism to the suffering workers and peasants, which appealed to them. After the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 that overthrew the Russian monarchy, he established a state ruled solely by the Communist Party. Although the structure of the state looked to be a kind of parliamentary democracy, the Communist Party controlled all the elections and it was the real power. This system also left the country vulnerable to political domination by a single person.

Joseph Stalin, who succeeded Lenin, proved to be a communist totalitarian dictator and used the policies of communism for his own ends. His communist government invoked harsh tactics including the purging of all alleged enemies, torture in prison camps, and forced labor. His five-year plans included rapid industrialization and collectivizing agriculture. In addition to the thousands of people who were executed or imprisoned, thousands more died due to famine and economic hardship during agricultural collectivization.

Communism would take a toll on the Soviet Union. Although it made the Soviet Union more modern and eventually a world power, it would also lead to economic and political problems. The Soviet economy suffered due to high cost of industrialization and from the lack of consumer goods and competitive marketing. Communist conflict
with the democracies of Western Europe led to a desire in the Soviet people to get rid of communism’s strict rule. But it was not until 1989 that Gorbachev’s policies of reform and openness introduced the possibility of democratic revolution and the fall of the communist regime.

The development of Great Britain owed much to its constitutional monarchy. A constitutional monarchy is a system of government where the monarch’s power is restricted by a constitution and a legislative body. Constitutional monarchies also protect the rights of individual citizens from abuse by the government. The monarch acts as the head of state, but in reality the legislative body makes the laws. Different constitutional monarchies grant different powers to their kings or queens. Parliament, the legislative body of England, emerged in the late middle ages and ever since has had influence over the English monarchies. During the struggle with King Charles I over money and war, Parliament actually had the king executed. Parliament’s role in government was finally defined during the Glorious Revolution when King William and Queen Mary agreed to a limitation of their powers by the Bill of Rights.

England, in contrast to the absolute monarchies of mainland Europe, was more democratic, therefore allowed gradual reforms. The codification of individual rights dates all the way back to when the English nobles made the king accept the Magna Carta. Other reforms included the extension of suffrage and labor reforms. This ability to make gradual changes was in contrast to the violent revolutions that occurred in France and Russia where absolute monarchs ruled. England has been referred to as the home of parliamentary democracy. It is known as a stable, modern country where the system of government has lasted until the present. Nations around the world have modeled their political systems on the characteristics first developed in England.

The cases of the Soviet Union and Britain show that political systems have a major impact on the history of a nation. The communist and totalitarian Soviet Union established military power at the expense of the economy and many lives. Britain’s constitutional monarchy has succeeded in creating and maintaining political stability. Without these key political systems, Russian and Great Britain would not have developed the way they did.