

### **History of socialism**

The history of socialism has its origins in the [French Revolution of 1789](#) and the changes which it wrought, although it has precedents in earlier movements and ideas. The [Communist Manifesto](#) was written by [Karl Marx](#) and [Friedrich Engels](#) in 1848 just before the [Revolutions of 1848](#) swept Europe, expressing what they termed "[scientific socialism](#)". In the last third of the 19th century, [Social Democratic parties](#) arose in Europe, drawing mainly from [Marxism](#). The [Australian Labor Party](#) was the world's first elected socialist party when the party won the 1899 [Queensland](#) state election. In the first half of the twentieth century, the [Soviet Union](#) and the [Communist parties](#) of the [Third International](#) around the world mainly came to represent socialism in terms of the [Soviet model of economic development](#), the creation of [centrally planned economies](#) directed by a state that owns all the means of production.

### **Mikhail Bakunin**

[Mikhail Bakunin](#) (1814–1876), the father of modern anarchism, was a [libertarian socialist](#), a theory by which the workers would directly manage the means of production through their own productive associations. There would be "equal means of subsistence, support, education, and opportunity for every child, boy or girl, until maturity, and equal resources and facilities in adulthood to create his own well-being by his own labor." While many socialists emphasized the gradual transformation of society, most notably through the foundation of small, Utopian communities, a growing number of socialists became disillusioned with the viability of this approach and instead emphasized [direct political action](#). Early socialists were united in their desire for a society based on cooperation rather than competition.

### **Marxism and the socialist movement**

Marx and Engels drew from these socialist or communist ideas born in the French revolution, as well as from the German philosophy of [GWF Hegel](#), and English political economy, particularly that of [Adam Smith](#) and [David Ricardo](#). Marx and Engels developed a body of ideas which they called [scientific socialism](#), more commonly called [Marxism](#). Marxism comprised a theory of history ([historical materialism](#)) as well as a political, economic and philosophical theory.

In the [Manifesto of the Communist Party](#), written in 1848 just days before the outbreak of the revolutions of 1848, Marx and Engels wrote, "The distinguishing feature of Communism is not the abolition of property generally, but the abolition of bourgeois property". Unlike those Marx described as [utopian](#) socialists, Marx determined that "[t]he history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles". While utopian socialists believed it was possible to work within or reform capitalist society, Marx confronted the question of the economic and political power of the capitalist class, expressed in their ownership of the means of producing wealth (factories, banks,

commerce – in a word, "Capital"). Marx and Engels formulated theories regarding the practical way of achieving and running a socialist system, which they saw as only being achieved by those who produce the wealth in society, the toilers, workers or "proletariat", gaining common ownership of their workplaces, the means of producing wealth.

Marx believed that capitalism could only be overthrown by means of a revolution carried out by the working class: "The proletarian movement is the self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority, in the interest of the immense majority." Marx believed that the proletariat was the only class with both the cohesion, the means and the determination to carry the revolution forward. Unlike the utopian socialists, who often idealised agrarian life and deplored the growth of modern industry, Marx saw the growth of capitalism and an urban proletariat as a necessary stage towards socialism.

For Marxists, socialism or, as Marx termed it, the first phase of communist society, can be viewed as a transitional stage characterized by common or state ownership of the [means of production](#) under democratic workers' control and management, which Engels argued was beginning to be realised in the [Paris Commune](#) of 1871, before it was overthrown. Socialism to them is simply the transitional phase between [capitalism](#) and "higher phase of communist society". Because this society has characteristics of both its capitalist ancestor and is beginning to show the properties of communism, it will hold the means of production collectively but distributes commodities [according to individual contribution](#). When the socialist state (the [dictatorship of the proletariat](#)) naturally withers away, what will remain is a society in which human beings no longer suffer from alienation and "all the springs of co-operative wealth flow more abundantly". Here "society inscribe[s] on its banners: [From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs!](#)" For Marx, a communist society entails the absence of differing [social classes](#) and thus the end of class warfare. According to Marx and Engels, once a socialist society had been ushered in, the state would begin to "wither away" and humanity would be in control of its own destiny for the first time.

### **International Workingmen's Association (First International)**

In Europe, harsh reaction followed the [revolutions of 1848](#), during which ten countries had experienced brief or long-term social upheaval as groups carried out nationalist uprisings. After most of these attempts at systematic change ended in failure, conservative elements took advantage of the divided groups of socialists, anarchists, liberals, and nationalists, to prevent further revolt. The [International Workingmen's Association](#) (IWA), also known as the First International, was founded in London in 1864. Victor Le Lubez, a French radical republican living in London, invited Karl Marx to come to London as a representative of German workers. The IWA held a preliminary conference in 1865, and had its first congress at [Geneva](#) in 1866. Marx was appointed a member of the committee, and according to Saul Padover, Marx and Johann Georg Eccarius, a tailor living in London, became "the two mainstays of the International

from its inception to its end". The First International became the first major international forum for the promulgation of socialist ideas. In 1864 the [International Workingmen's Association](#) (sometimes called the "First International") united diverse revolutionary currents including French followers of [Proudhon](#), [Blanquists](#), [Philadelphes](#), English trade unionists, socialists and [social democrats](#).

In 1868, following their unsuccessful participation in the [League of Peace and Freedom](#) (LPF), Russian revolutionary [Mikhail Bakunin](#) and his [collectivist anarchist](#) associates joined the First International (which had decided not to get involved with the LPF). They allied themselves with the [federalist](#) socialist sections of the International, who advocated the revolutionary overthrow of the state and the collectivization of property. The [Social Democratic Workers' Party of Germany](#) was founded in 1869 under the influence of Marx and Engels. In 1875, it merged with the [General German Workers' Association](#) of [Ferdinand Lassalle](#) to become what is known today as the [German Social Democratic Party](#) (SPD). Socialism became increasingly associated with newly formed [trade unions](#). In Germany, the SPD founded unions. At first, the collectivists worked with the Marxists to push the First International in a more revolutionary socialist direction. Subsequently, the International became polarised into two camps, with Marx and Bakunin as their respective figureheads. Bakunin characterised Marx's ideas as [centralist](#) and predicted that, if a Marxist party came to power, its leaders would simply take the place of the [ruling class](#) they had fought against. In 1872, the conflict climaxed with a final split between the two groups at the [Hague Congress](#), where Bakunin and [James Guillaume](#) were expelled from the International and its headquarters were transferred to New York.

### **Paris Commune**

In 1871, in the wake of the [Franco-Prussian War](#) an uprising in Paris established the Paris Commune. The [Paris Commune](#) was a government that briefly ruled Paris from 18 March (more formally, from 28 March) to 28 May 1871. The Commune was the result of an uprising in Paris after France was defeated in the Franco-Prussian War. Anarchists participated actively in the establishment of the Paris Commune. The 92 members of the *Communal Council* included a high proportion of skilled workers and several professionals. Many of them were political activists, ranging from reformist republicans, various types of socialists, to the [Jacobins](#) who tended to look back nostalgically to the [Revolution of 1789](#). The "reforms initiated by the Commune, such as the re-opening of workplaces as co-operatives. According to Marx and Engels, for a few weeks the Paris Commune provided a glimpse of a socialist society before it was brutally suppressed by the French government. "From the outset the Commune was compelled to recognize that the working class, once come to power, could not manage with the old state machine; that in order not to lose again its only just conquered supremacy, this working class must, on the one hand, do away with all the old repressive machinery previously used against it itself, and, on the other, safeguard itself against its own deputies and officials, by declaring them all, without exception, subject to recall at any moment." - Frederick Engels

## The Second International

As the ideas of Marx and Engels took on flesh, particularly in central Europe, socialists sought to unite in an international organisation. In 1889, on the centennial of the French Revolution of 1789, the [Second International](#) was founded, with 384 delegates from 20 countries representing about 300 labour and socialist organizations. Just before his death in 1895, Engels argued that there was now a "single generally recognised, crystal clear theory of Marx" and a "single great international army of socialists". Despite its illegality due to the [Anti-Socialist Laws](#) of 1878, the [Social Democratic Party of Germany](#)'s use of the limited universal male suffrage were "potent" new methods of struggle which demonstrated their growing strength and forced the dropping of the Anti-Socialist legislation in 1890, Engels argued. In 1893, the German SPD obtained 1,787,000 votes, a quarter of votes cast.

## Germany

The SPD was by far the most powerful of the social democratic parties. Its votes reached 4.5 million, it had 90 daily newspapers, together with trade unions and co-ops, sports clubs, a youth organization, a women's organization and hundreds of full-time officials. Under the pressure of this growing party, [Bismarck](#) introduced limited welfare provision and working hours were reduced. Germany experienced sustained economic growth for more than forty years. Commentators suggest that this expansion, together with the concessions won, gave rise to illusions amongst the leadership of the SPD that capitalism would evolve into socialism gradually. Just as the Social Democrats in the USA say that the Democratic Party can be used to evolve into socialism gradually.

Beginning in 1896, in a series of articles published under the title "Problems of socialism", [Eduard Bernstein](#) argued that an evolutionary transition to socialism was both possible and more desirable than revolutionary change. Bernstein and his supporters came to be identified as "[revisionists](#)" because they sought to revise the [classic tenets of Marxism](#). Although the [orthodox Marxists](#) in the party, led by [Karl Kautsky](#), retained the Marxist theory of revolution as the official doctrine of the party, and it was repeatedly endorsed by SPD conferences, in practice the SPD leadership became increasingly [reformist](#).

## Russia.

Bernstein coined the aphorism: "The movement is everything, the final goal nothing". But the path of reform appeared blocked to the Russian Marxists while Russia remained the bulwark of reaction. In the preface to the 1882 Russian edition to the Communist Manifesto, Marx and Engels had saluted the Russian Marxists who, they said, "formed the vanguard of revolutionary action in Europe". But the working class, although many were organised in vast modern western-owned enterprises, comprised no more than a small percentage of the population and "more than half the land is owned in common by the peasants". Marx and Engels posed the question: How was Russia to progress to socialism? Could Russia "pass directly" to socialism or "must it

first pass through the same process" of capitalist development as the West? They replied: "If the Russian Revolution becomes the signal for a [proletarian revolution](#) in the West, so that both complement each other, the present Russian common ownership of land may serve as the starting point for a communist development."

In 1903, the [Russian Social Democratic Labour Party](#) began to split on ideological and organizational questions into [Bolshevik](#) ('Majority') and [Menshevik](#) ('Minority') factions, with Russian revolutionary [Vladimir Lenin](#) leading the more radical Bolsheviks. The Mensheviks awaited the capitalist revolution in Russia. But Lenin argued that a revolution of the workers and peasants would achieve this task.

### **United States**

In 1877, the [Socialist Labor Party of America](#) was founded. This party, which advocated Marxism and still exists today, was a confederation of small Marxist parties and came under the leadership of [Daniel De Leon](#). In 1901, a merger between opponents of De Leon and the younger [Social Democratic Party](#) joined with [Eugene V. Debs](#) to form the [Socialist Party of America](#). In 1905, the [Industrial Workers of the World](#) formed from several independent labor unions. The IWW opposed the political means of Debs and De Leon, as well as the [craft unionism](#) of [Samuel Gompers](#). In 1910, the [Sewer Socialists](#), the main group of American socialists, elected [Victor Berger](#) as a socialist Congressman and [Emil Seidel](#) as a socialist mayor of [Milwaukee, Wisconsin](#), most of the other elected city officials being socialist as well. This Socialist Party of America grew to 150,000 in 1912 and polled 897,000 votes in the presidential campaign of that year, 6 percent of the total vote. Socialist mayor [Daniel Hoan](#), was elected in 1916 and stayed in office until 1940. The final Socialist mayor, [Frank P. Zeidler](#), was elected in 1948 and served three terms, ending in 1960. [Milwaukee](#) remained the hub of Socialism during these years. The Socialist Party declined after the First World War. By the 1880s [anarcho-communism](#) was already present in the United States as can be seen in the publication of the journal *Freedom: A Revolutionary Anarchist-Communist Monthly* by [Lucy Parsons](#) and [Lizzy Holmes](#).

### **WW1**

When World War I began in 1914, many European socialist leaders supported their respective governments' war aims. The social democratic parties in the UK, France, Belgium and Germany supported their respective state's wartime military and economic planning, discarding their commitment to [internationalism](#) and solidarity.

Lenin, in his [April Theses](#), denounced the war as an [imperialist](#) conflict, and urged workers worldwide to use it as an occasion for [proletarian](#) revolution. The Second International dissolved during the war, while Lenin, [Karl Liebknecht](#) and [Rosa Luxemburg](#), together with a small number of other Marxists opposed to the war, came together in the [Zimmerwald Conference](#) in September 1915.

### **Social Democracy to 1917**

In 1914, the outbreak of World War I led to a crisis in European socialism. The parliamentary leaderships of the socialist parties of Germany, France, Belgium and Britain each voted to support the war aims of their country's governments, although some leaders, like [Ramsay MacDonald](#) in Britain and Karl Liebknecht in Germany, opposed the war from the start. Lenin, in exile in Switzerland, called for revolutions in all the combatant states as the only way to end the war and achieve socialism. The Russian Revolution of October 1917 led to a withdrawal from World War I, one of the principal demands of the Russian revolution, as the Soviet government immediately sued for peace. Germany and the former allies invaded the new Soviet Russia, which had repudiated the former [Romanov](#) regime's national debts and nationalized the banks and major industry. Russia was the only country in the world where socialists had taken power.

### The inter-war era and World War II

The [Russian Revolution](#) of October 1917 brought about the definitive ideological division between Communists as denoted with a capital "C" on the one hand and other communist and socialist trends such as anarcho-communists and social democrats, on the other. In 1922, the fourth congress of the [Communist International](#) took up the policy of the [United Front](#), urging Communists to work with rank and file Social Democrats while remaining critical of their leaders, who they criticised for "betraying" the working class by supporting the war efforts of their respective capitalist classes.

### **Revolutionary Socialism and the Soviet Union (1917-1939)**

After three years, the First World War, at first greeted with enthusiastic patriotism, produced an upsurge of radicalism in most of Europe and also as far afield as the United States (see *Socialism in the United States*) and Australia. In the Russian revolution of February 1917, workers' councils (in [Russian](#), *soviets*) had been formed, and Lenin and the Bolsheviks called for "All power to the Soviets". After the October 1917 Russian revolution, led by Lenin and Trotsky, consolidated power in the Soviets, Lenin declared "Long live the world socialist revolution!". Briefly in Soviet Russia socialism was not just a vision of a future society, but a description of an existing one. The Soviet regime began to bring all the means of production (except agricultural production) under state control, and implemented a system of government through the workers' councils or soviets.