
Materialism and Realism (1850-1914)

Marx and Scientific Socialism

From 1815 to 1848, Utopian Socialists, such as Charles Fourier, Robert Owen, and Louis de Rouvroy Saint-Simon, advocated a political-economic system based on romantic concepts of the ideal society. The failure of the revolutions of 1848 discredited the Utopians, so the new “Scientific Socialism” advanced by Karl Marx (1818-1883) became the new ideology of protest and revolution. Marx, a German philosopher, developed a communist philosophy that ironically depended on the goodness of men: this Rousseau-influenced position argued that men were basically good but had been corrupted by artificial institutions (states, churches, and so on) from which they had evolved, Marx stated that the history of humanity was the history of class struggle, and that the process of the struggle (the dialectic) would continue until a classless society was realized: the Marxian dialectic was driven by the dynamics of materialism. Further, he contended that the age of bourgeois domination of the working classes was the most severe and oppressive phase of the struggle. The proletariat, or industrial working class, needed to be educated and led toward a violent revolution that would destroy the institutions that perpetuated the struggle and the suppression of the majority. After the revolution, the people would experience the dictatorship of the proletariat, during which the Communist Party would provide leadership. Marx advanced these ideas in *The Communist Manifesto* (1848), *Critique of Political Economy* (1859), and *Capital* (1863-1864). In most instances, his arguments were couched in scientific form; Marx accumulated extensive data and developed a persuasive rhetorical style. In the 1860s, Marxism was being accepted by many reformers. He lived most of his adult life in London exile, where he died in 1883.

The Anarchists

Anarchism emerged in the nineteenth century as a byproduct of the Industrial Revolution. Its early proponents, William Godwin (1756-1836) and Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (1809-1865), argued that anarchism, a system in which there would be no property or authority, would be attained through enlightened individualism. Proudhon, in *What is Property?* (1840), stated that anarchism would be achieved through education and without violence. After the revolutions of 1848 to 1849, Mikhail Bakunin, a Russian, stated that violent, terrorist actions were necessary to move people to revolt against their

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oppressors: anarchism has been associated with violence since Bakunin. A variation of anarchism, syndicalism, was developed by Georges Sorel in France. Syndicalism, sometimes referred to as anarcho-syndicalism, involved direct economic actions in order to control industries. The general strike and industrial sabotage were employed frequently by the syndicalists, whose influence was restricted to France, Spain, and Italy.

The Revisionist Movement

A reconsideration of Marxism commenced before Marx's death in 1883. That year a group of British leftists organized themselves as the Fabian Society and declared that, while they were sympathetic to Marxism – indeed, they considered themselves Marxists – they differed from the orthodox on two major points:

1. They did not accept the inevitability of revolution in order to bring about a socialist, that is, communist society; democratic societies possessed the mechanisms that would lead to the gradual evolution of socialism.
2. They did not accept the Marxist interpretation of contemporary history; they contended the historical processes endured and were difficult to redirect and reform, while Marxists tended to accept the notion that world revolution was imminent.

Sidney and Beatrice Webb, George Bernard Shaw, Keir Hardie were among those who formed the Fabian Society. Later it would split over the Boer War, but its members would serve in every Labour Party ministry.

In Germany, the Social Democratic Party (SDP) had been established by orthodox Marxists. In the 1890s, Edward Bernstein (1850-1932), influenced by the Fabians, redirected the efforts and platform of the SDP toward the revisionist position. Within a few years, the SDP extended its credibility and support to acquire a dominant position in the *Reichstag* (Germany's legislative assembly). In 1912, it became the largest party, which may have led German militarists in 1914 to consider continental war better than “turning red.”

The French socialist Jean Jaurés (1859-1914) led his group to revisionism; their moderation led to an increase of seats in the Chamber of Deputies and their acceptance for criticisms and proposals during the tumultuous years of the Dreyfus Affair (discussed later in the chapter). He was murdered on the eve of the First World War, a symbolic defeat for the pacifism of most Social Democrats in Europe.

While orthodox Marxists (such as Lenin) denounced the revisionist

movement, the majority of socialists in 1914 were revisionists who were willing to use the democratic process to bring about their goals.

Unfortunately, a byproduct of their compromise position was a willingness to be seduced by nationalist propaganda and thus to support the First World War.