

Week 6: Communism and Social Democracy

Chapter 4, Roads to Socialism, p. 109-123.
Social democracy, p. 125, 128-133.

Roads to Socialism – Disagreement over the means and the ends to socialism

Revolutionary Socialism

Many early socialists believed that socialism could only be introduced *by* the revolutionary overthrow of the existing political *system*, and accepted that violence would be an inevitable feature of such a **revolution**.

Revolution: A fundamental and irreversible change, often a brief but dramatic period of upheaval; systemic change.

In the second half of the Twentieth century, faith in revolution was most evident amongst socialists in the developing world. These regimes can be characterized by three distinct features:

First, the use of force accustomed the rulers to regard violence as a legitimate instrument of policy; as Mao put it, 'power resides in the barrel of a gun'. Second, revolutionary parties typically adopted military-style structures, based on strong leadership and strict discipline that were merely consolidated once power was achieved. Third, in rooting out the vestiges of the old order, all oppositional forces were also removed, effectively preparing the way for the construction of totalitarian dictatorships.

The counter revolutions of 1989-1991

Evolutionary Socialism

As the nineteenth century progressed enthusiasm for popular revolt waned at least in the advanced capitalist states of western and central Europe. Capitalism itself had matured and, by the late nineteenth century, the urban working class had lost its revolutionary character and was being integrated into society.

Furthermore, the gradual advance of political democracy led to the extension of the franchise (the right to vote) to the working classes.

The Fabian Society, formed in 1884, took up the cause of parliamentary socialism in the UK. The Fabians, led by Beatrice Webb (1858- 1943) and Sidney Webb (1859- 1947), and including noted intellectuals such as George Bernard Shaw and H. G. Wells, took their name from the Roman General Fabius Maximus who was noted for the patient and defensive tactics he had employed in defeating Hannibal's invading armies.

elite groups converted to socialism + (a combination of political action and education)

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The Webbs were actively involved in the formation of the UK Labour Party, and helped to write its 1918 constitution.

Fabian ideas also had an impact on the German Socialist Democratic Party (SDP), formed in 1875.

Revisionism

Eduard Bernstein (following Lassalle) developed ideas that paralleled the Fabian belief in gradualism. The working class could use the ballot box to introduce socialism which would therefore develop as an evolutionary outgrowth of capitalism.

Expectations of the social democrats pages 113 and 114

Some have even argued that democratic socialism is founded on a contradiction: in order to respond successfully to electoral pressures, socialists have been forced to revise or 'water down' their ideological beliefs.

Decline in the socialist character of the working class?

Can socialist parties, even if elected to power, carry out socialist reforms?