

**Varieties of European Marxism**

Among the ideologies and social movements that grew out of Europe's Industrial Revolution, none was more important than socialism. When it emerged in the nineteenth century, the word "socialism" referred to public or state ownership and control of the means of production and distribution (land, railroads, and factories, for example). Adherents hoped to achieve far greater equality and cooperation than was possible under the competitive and cutthroat capitalism of an industrializing Europe. Clearly the most important socialist ideas derived from the writings of Karl Marx. Known widely as Marxism, those ideas spawned a variety of interpretations, applications, and debates. For many people, they also served as a way of understanding the world perhaps akin to an alternative religion, or an alternative to religion.

The historical significance of Marxist socialism was immense. First, it offered a devastating critique of the industrializing process as it unfolded during the nineteenth century—its inequalities, its instability, its materialism, its exploitation of workers. For followers of Marx, however, that critique was thoroughly modern, embracing the new science, technology, and means of production that the Industrial Revolution had generated, while deploring the social outcomes of that process and the capitalist economic system in which it took place. Second, socialists offered an alternative model for industrializing societies, imagining a future that would more fully realize the promise of modern industry and more equally distribute its benefits. Third, Marxist thinking gave a sharp edge to the social conflicts that characterized industrializing Europe. Those conflicts featured two classes, both of which grew substantially during the nineteenth century). One was the wealthy industrial business class, the bourgeoisie, those who owned and managed the mines, factories, and docks of an industrializing Europe. The other involved the proletariat, the workers in those enterprises—often impoverished, exploited, and living in squalid conditions. Finally, nineteenth-century Marxism provided the foundation for twentieth-century world communism as it took shape in Russia, China, Vietnam, Cuba, and elsewhere.

By the end of the nineteenth century, socialism had become a major element of European political and intellectual life, and it enjoyed a modest presence in the United States and Japan and among a handful of intellectuals elsewhere. Its spread to the rest of the world would have to await developments in the twentieth century. The documents that follow illustrate some of the ways that Marxist socialism was expressed and contested within a nineteenth-century European context.

**Socialism According to Marx**

The early currents of socialist thinking took shape during the first quarter of the nineteenth century in the minds of various thinkers—the Englishman Robert Owen and the Frenchman Charles Fourier, for example, both of whom were appalled by the social divisions that industrial society generated. As an alternative they proposed small-scale, voluntary, and cooperative communities, and their followers actually established a number of such experimental groups in Europe and the United States. But the most significant expression of modern socialism took shape in the fertile mind of the brilliant German intellectual Karl Marx (1818-1883). His life coincided with perhaps the harshest phase of capitalist industrialization in Europe. At that time an encompassing market economy was rudely shattering older institutions and traditions, but the benefits of this new and highly productive system were not yet widely shared (see pp. 835-36). But in this brutal process, Marx discerned the inevitable approach of a new world. Document One presents excerpts from the most famous of Marx's writings, the Communist Manifesto, first published in 1848. In this effort and throughout much of his life, Marx was assisted by another German thinker, Friedrich Engels (1820-1895), the son of a successful textile manufacturer. Engels became radicalized as he witnessed the devastating social results of capitalist industrialization.

Marx and Engels's Manifesto begins with a summary description of the historical process. Much of the document then analyzes what the authors call the "bourgeoisie" or the "bourgeois epoch," terms that refer to the age of industrial capitalism.

**Document One: Questions**

1. How do Marx and Engels understand the motor of change in human history? How do they view the role of class?
2. What are Marx and Engels's criticisms of the existing social system? What do they see as its major achievements?
3. Why do Marx and Engels believe that the capitalist system is doomed?
4. How does the industrial proletariat differ from the lower class of the preindustrial era? What role do Marx and Engels foresee for the proletariat?
5. Which of Marx and Engels's descriptions and predictions ring true even now? In what respects was their analysis disproved by later developments?
6. How do Marx and Engels describe the socialist society that will follow the collapse of the capitalist system? Why do they believe that only a revolution, "the forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions," will enable the creation of a socialist society?

**Document One: KARL MARX AND FRIEDRICH ENGELS *The Communist Manifesto*, 1848**

The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes.... Our epoch, the epoch of the bourgeoisie, possesses, however, this distinct feature: it has simplified class antagonisms. Society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other bourgeoisie and proletariat...

Modern industry has established the world market, for which the discovery of America paved the way. This market has given an immense development to commerce, to navigation, to communication by land.... [T]he bourgeoisie has at last, since the establishment of Modern Industry and of the world market, conquered for itself, in the modern representative state, exclusive political sway. The executive of the modern state is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie. The bourgeoisie, historically, has played a most revolutionary part.

The bourgeoisie, wherever it has got the upper hand, has put an end to all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations. It has pitilessly torn asunder the motley feudal ties that bound man to his "natural superiors," and has left no other nexus between people than naked self-interest, than callous "cash payment." It has drowned out the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervor, of chivalrous enthusiasm, of philistine sentimentalism, in the icy water of egotistical calculation. It has resolved personal worth into exchange value, and in place of the numberless indefeasible chartered freedoms, has set up that single, unconscionable freedom-Free Trade. In one word, for exploitation, veiled by religious and political illusions, it has substituted naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation.

The bourgeoisie has stripped of its halo every occupation hitherto honored and looked up to with reverent awe. It has converted the physician, the lawyer, the priest, the poet, the man of science, into its paid wage laborers.

The bourgeoisie has torn away from the family its sentimental veil, and has reduced the family relation into a mere money relation....

It has been the first to show what man's activity can bring about. It has accomplished wonders far surpassing Egyptian pyramids, Roman aqueducts, and Gothic cathedrals....

The need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the entire surface of the globe. It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connections everywhere....

All old-established national industries have been destroyed or are daily being destroyed. They are dislodged by new industries, whose introduction becomes a life and death question for all civilized nations, by

industries that no longer work up indigenous raw material, but raw material drawn from the remotest zones; industries whose products are consumed, not only at home, but in every quarter of the globe. In place of the old wants, satisfied by the production of the country, we find new wants, requiring for their satisfaction the products of distant lands and climes. In place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal interdependence of nations....

The bourgeoisie, by the rapid improvement of all instruments of production, by the immensely facilitated means of communication, draws all, even the most barbarian, nations into civilization. The cheap prices of commodities are the heavy artillery with which it forces the barbarians' intensely obstinate hatred of foreigners to capitulate. It compels all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production; it compels them to introduce what it calls civilization into their midst, i.e., to become bourgeois themselves. In one word, it creates a world after its own image.

The bourgeoisie has subjected the country to the rule of the towns. It has created enormous cities, has greatly increased the urban population as compared with the rural, and has thus rescued a considerable part of the population from the idiocy of rural life. Just as it has made the country dependent on the towns, so it has made barbarian and semibarbarian countries dependent on the civilized ones, nations of peasants on nations of bourgeois, the East on the West....

The bourgeoisie, during its rule of scarce one hundred years, has created more massive and more colossal productive forces than have all preceding generations together. Subjection of nature's forces to man, machinery, application of chemistry to industry and agriculture, steam navigation, railways, electric telegraphs, clearing of whole continents for cultivation, canalization of rivers, whole populations conjured out of the ground—what earlier century had even a presentiment that such productive forces slumbered in the lap of social labor? ...

It is enough to mention the commercial crises that, by their periodical return, put the existence of the entire bourgeois society on its trial, each time more threateningly... In these crises, there breaks out an epidemic that, in all earlier epochs, would have seemed an absurdity—the epidemic of overproduction....

But not only has the bourgeoisie forged the weapons that bring death to itself, it has also called into existence the men who are to wield those weapons—the modern working class—the proletarians.... These laborers, who must sell themselves piecemeal, are a commodity, like every other article of commerce, and are consequently exposed to all the vicissitudes of competition, to all the fluctuations of the market.

Owing to the extensive use of machinery, and to the division of labor, the work of the proletarians has lost all individual character, and, consequently, all charm for the workman. He becomes an appendage of the machine, and it is only the most simple, most monotonous, and most easily acquired knack, that is required of him....

Masses of laborers, crowded into the factory, are organized like soldiers. As privates of the industrial army, they are placed under the command of a perfect hierarchy of officers and sergeants. Not only are they slaves of the bourgeois class, and of the bourgeois state; they are daily and hourly enslaved by the machine, by the overlooker, and, above all, by the individual bourgeois manufacturer himself...

The lower strata of the middle class—the small tradespeople, shopkeepers, and retired tradesmen generally, the handicraftsmen and peasants—all these sink gradually into the proletariat.... Thus, the proletariat is recruited from all classes of the population.... This organization of the proletarians into a class, and, consequently, into a political party, is continually being upset again by the competition between the workers themselves. But it ever rises up again, stronger, firmer, mightier....

Finally, in times when the class struggle nears the decisive hour.... a small section of the ruling class cuts itself adrift, and joins the revolutionary class, the class that holds the future in its hands... What the bourgeoisie therefore produces, above all, are its own grave-diggers. Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable....

We have seen above that the first step in the revolution by the working class is to raise the proletariat to the position of ruling class, to win the battle of democracy.

The proletariat will use its political supremacy to wrest, by degree, all capital from the bourgeoisie, to centralize all instruments of production in the hands of the state, i.e., of the proletariat organized as the ruling class; and to increase the total productive forces as rapidly as possible.

Of course, in the beginning, this cannot be effected except by means of despotic inroads on the rights of property.

These measures will, of course, be different in different countries.

Nevertheless, in most advanced countries, the following will be pretty generally applicable.

1. Abolition of property in land and application of all rents of land to public purposes.
2. A heavy progressive or graduated income tax.
3. Abolition of all rights of inheritance.
4. Confiscation of the property of all emigrants and rebels.
5. Centralization of credit in the banks of the state, by means of a national bank with state capital and an exclusive monopoly.
6. Centralization of the means of communication and transport in the hands of the state.
7. Extension of factories and instruments of production owned by the state; the bringing into cultivation of waste lands, and the improvement of the soil generally in accordance with a common plan.
8. Equal obligation of all to work. Establishment of industrial armies, especially for agriculture.
9. Combination of agriculture with manufacturing industries; gradual abolition of all the distinction between town and country by a more equable distribution of the populace over the country.
10. Free education for all children in public schools. Abolition of children's factory labor in its present form. Combination of education with industrial production, etc.

When, in the course of development, class distinctions have disappeared, and all production has been concentrated in the hands of a vast association of the whole nation, the public power will lose its political character. Political power, properly so called, is merely the organized power of one class for oppressing another. If the proletariat during its contest with the bourgeoisie is compelled, by the force of circumstances, to organize itself as a class; if, by means of a revolution, it makes itself the ruling class, and, as such, sweeps away by force the old conditions of production, then it will, along with these conditions, have swept away the conditions for the existence of class antagonisms and of classes generally, and will thereby have abolished its own supremacy as a class.

In place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all...

The Communists disdain to conceal their views and aims. They openly declare that their ends can be attained only by the forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions. Let the ruling classes tremble at a communist revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win.

**Introduction**

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels provided the set of ideas that informed much of the European socialist movement during the second half of the nineteenth century. Organized in various national parties and joined together in international organizations as well, socialists usually referred to themselves as social democrats, for they were seeking to extend the principles of democracy from the political arena (voting rights, for example) into the realm of the economy and society. By the 1890s, however, some of them had begun to question at least part of Marx's teachings, especially the need for violent revolution. The chief spokesperson for this group of socialists, known as "revisionists," was Eduard Bernstein (1850-1932), a prominent member of the German Social Democratic Party. His ideas provoked a storm of controversy within European socialist circles. Document 18.2 is drawn from the preface of Bernstein's 1899 book, *Evolutionary Socialism*.

1. In what ways and for what reasons was Bernstein critical of Marx and Engels's analysis of capitalism?
2. Why do you think he refers so often to Engels?
3. What strategy does Bernstein recommend for the German Social Democratic Party?
4. What does he mean by saying that "the movement means me and... 'the final aim of socialism' is nothing"?
5. Why would some of Marx's followers have considered Bernstein a virtual traitor to the socialist cause?

**Socialism without Devolution: Document Two**

It has been maintained in a certain quarter that the practical deductions from my treatises would be the abandonment of the conquest of political power by the proletariat organized politically and economically. That [idea] ... I altogether deny.

I set myself against the notion that we have to expect shortly a collapse of the bourgeois economy... The adherents of this theory of a catastrophe, base it especially on the conclusions of the Communist Manifesto. This is a mistake....

Social conditions have not developed to such an acute opposition of things and classes as is depicted in the Manifesto. It is not only useless, it is the greatest folly to attempt to conceal this from ourselves. The number of members of the possessing classes is today not smaller but larger. The enormous increase of social wealth is not accompanied by a decreasing number of large capitalists but by an increasing number of capitalists of all degrees.

The middle classes change their character but they do not disappear from the social scale. The concentration in productive industry is not being accomplished even today in all its departments with equal thoroughness and at an equal rate.... Trade statistics show an extraordinarily elaborated graduation of enterprises in regard to size....

In all advanced countries we see the privileges of the capitalist bourgeoisie yielding step by step to democratic organizations. Under the influence of this, and driven by the movement of the working classes which is daily becoming stronger, a social reaction has set in against the exploiting tendencies of capital.... Factory legislation, the democratizing of local government, and the extension of its area of work, the freeing of trade unions and systems of cooperative trading from legal restrictions, the consideration of standard conditions of labor in the work undertaken by public authorities—all these characterize this phase of the evolution. But the more the political organizations of modern nations are democratized, the more the needs and opportunities of great political catastrophes are diminished....

[Engels] points out in conformity with this opinion that the next task of the party should be "to work for an uninterrupted increase of its votes" or to carry on a slow propaganda of parliamentary activity.... Shall we be told that he [Engels] abandoned the conquest of political power by the working classes ... ? [F]or a long time yet the task of social democracy is, instead of speculating on a great economic crash, "to organize the working classes politically and develop them as a democracy and to fight for all reforms in the State which are adapted to raise the working classes and transform the State in the direction of democracy."... [T]he movement means everything for me and that what is usually called "the final aim of socialism" is nothing.... The conquest of political power by the working classes, the expropriation of capitalists, are not ends themselves but only means for the accomplishment of certain aims and endeavors.... But the conquest of political power necessitates the possession of political rights; German social democracy [must] devise the best ways for the extension of the political and economic rights of the German working classes.

Marxist socialism focused largely on issues of class, but that movement coincided with the emergence of feminism, giving rise to what many socialists called "the woman question." The main theoretical issue was the source of female subjugation. Did it derive from private property and the class structure of capitalist society, or was it the product of deeply rooted cultural

attitudes independent of class? While middle-class feminists generally assumed the second view, orthodox Marxist thinking aligned with the first one, believing that the lack of economic independence was the root cause of women's subordination. Their liberation would follow, more or less automatically, after the creation of socialist societies. On a more practical level, the question was whether socialist parties should seek to enroll women by actively supporting their unique concerns—suffrage, equal pay, education, maternity insurance. Or did such efforts divide the working class and weaken the socialist movement? Should socialists treat women as members of an oppressed class or as members of an oppressed sex? Among the leading figures addressing such issues was Clara Zetkin (1857-1933), a prominent German socialist and feminist. In the following document, Zetkin outlines the efforts of the German Social Democratic Party to reach out to women and describes the party's posture toward middle-class feminism.

6. How would you describe Zetkin's view of the relationship between socialism and feminism? Which one has priority in her thinking?
7. Why is she so insistent that the Social Democratic Party of Germany address the concerns of women? How precisely did it do so?

### REVOLUTIONS of INDUSTRIALIZATION, 1750-1914: Document Three

8. Why does she believe that women's issues will be better served within a socialist framework than in a bourgeois women's rights movement?
9. How might critics—both feminist and socialist—argue with Zetkin?

CLARA ZETKIN, The German Socialist Women's Movement, 1909

"In 1907 the Social-Democratic Party of Germany [SDP] embraced 29,458 women members, in 1908 they numbered 62,257.... One hundred and fifty lecture and study circles for women have been established.... Socialist propaganda amongst the workers' wives and women wage-earners has been carried on by many hundred public meetings, in which women comrades addressed more particularly working-class women....

The women's office works now in conjunction with the Party's Executive .... They are to make a vigorous propaganda that the wage-earning women shall in large numbers exercise the franchise to the administrative bodies of the State Sick-Insurance, the only kind of franchise women possess in Germany. The women comrades were further engaged to form local committees for the protection of children.... Besides this, Socialist women were reminded to found and improve protective committees for womenworkers, and collect their grievances on illegal and pernicious conditions of labor, forwarding them to the factory inspector.

Besides their activity in that line, the Socialist women have continued their propaganda in favor of the full political emancipation of their sex. The struggle for universal suffrage ... was a struggle for adult suffrage for both sexes, vindicated in meetings and leaflets. Public and factory meetings in great number; and an indefatigable activity in other different forms, have served the trade union organizations of the women workers .... The work Source: Clara Zetkin, The German Socialist Women's Movement, Marxists Internet Archive, [www.marxists.org](http://www.marxists.org). of our trade unions to enlighten, train, and organize wage-earning women is not smaller nor less important than what the S.D.P. has done to induce women to join in political struggles of the working class....

The most prominent feature of the Socialist women's movement in Germany is its clearness and revolutionary spirit as to Socialist theories and principles. The women who head it are fully conscious that the social fate of their sex is indissolubly connected with the general evolution of society, the most powerful moving force of which is the evolution of labor, of economic life. The integral human emancipation of all women depends in consequence on the social emancipation of labor; that can only be realized by the class-war of the exploited majority. Therefore, our Socialist women oppose strongly the bourgeois women righters' credo that the women of all classes must gather into an unpolitical, neutral movement striving exclusively for women's rights. In theory and practice they maintain the conviction that the class antagonisms are much more powerful, effective, and decisive than the social antagonisms between the sexes.... [T]hus the working-class women will [only] win their full emancipation... in the classwar of all the exploited, without difference of sex, against all who exploit, without difference of sex. That does not mean at all that they undervalue the importance of the political emancipation of the female sex. On the contrary, they employ much more energy than the German women-righters to conquer the suffrage. But the vote is, according to their views, not the last word and term of their aspirations, but only a weapon—a means in struggle for a revolutionary aim—the Socialistic order.