

As a university student, Karl Marx (1818-1883) joined a movement known as the Young Hegelians, who strongly criticized the political and cultural establishments of the day. He became a journalist, and the radical nature of his writings would eventually get him expelled by the governments of Germany, France and Belgium. In 1848, Marx and fellow German thinker Friedrich Engels published “The Communist Manifesto,” which introduced their concept of socialism as a natural result of the conflicts inherent in the capitalist system. Marx later moved to London, where he would live for the rest of his life. In 1867, he published the first volume of “Capital” (Das Kapital), in which he laid out his vision of capitalism and its inevitable tendencies toward self-destruction, and took part in a growing international workers’ movement based on his revolutionary theories.

Karl Marx’s Early Life and Education

Karl Marx was born in 1818 in Trier, Prussia; he was the oldest surviving boy in a family of nine children. Both of his parents were Jewish, and descended from a long line of rabbis, but his father, a lawyer, converted to Lutheranism in 1816 due to contemporary laws barring Jews from higher society. Young Karl was baptized in the same church at the age of 6, but later became an atheist.

Karl Marx’s Life in London and “Das Kapital”

With revolutionary uprisings engulfing Europe in 1848, Marx left Belgium just before being expelled by that country’s government. He briefly returned to Paris and Germany before settling in London, where he would live for the rest of his life, despite being denied British citizenship. He worked as a journalist there, including 10 years as a correspondent for the [New York Daily Tribune](#), but never quite managed to earn a living wage, and was supported financially by Engels. In time, Marx became increasingly isolated from fellow London Communists, and focused more on developing his economic theories. In 1864, however, he helped found the International Workingmen’s Association (known as the First International) and

wrote its inaugural address. Three years later, Marx published the first volume of “Capital” (Das Kapital) his masterwork of economic theory. In it he expressed a desire to reveal “the economic law of motion of modern society” and laid out his theory of capitalism as a dynamic system that contained the seeds of its own self-destruction and subsequent triumph of communism. Marx would spend the rest of his life working on manuscripts for additional volumes, but they remained unfinished at the time of his death, of pleurisy, on March 14, 1883.

Socialism

Socialism describes any political or economic theory that says the community, rather than individuals, should own and manage property and natural resources. The term “socialism” has been applied to very different economic and political systems throughout history, including utopianism, anarchism, Soviet communism and social democracy. These systems vary widely in structure, but they share an opposition to an unrestricted market economy, and the belief that public ownership of the means of production (and making money) will lead to better distribution of wealth and a more egalitarian society.

Emergence of socialism

The intellectual roots of socialism go back at least as far as ancient Greek times, when the philosopher [Plato](#) depicted a type of collective society in his dialog, *Republic* (360 B.C.). In 16th-century England, [Thomas More](#) drew on Platonic ideals for his *Utopia*, an imaginary island where money has been abolished and people live and work communally.

In the late 18th century, the [invention](#) of the steam engine powered the [Industrial Revolution](#), which brought sweeping economic and social change first to Great Britain, then to the rest of the world. Factory owners became wealthy, while many workers [lived in increasing poverty](#), laboring for long hours under difficult and sometimes dangerous conditions. socialism emerged as a response to

the expanding capitalist system. It presented an alternative, aimed at improving the lot of the working class and creating a more egalitarian society. In its emphasis on public ownership of the means of production, socialism contrasted sharply with capitalism, which is based around a free market system and private ownership.

Influence of Karl Marx

It was [Karl Marx](#), undoubtedly the most influential theorist of socialism, who called Owen, Fourier and other earlier socialist thinkers “utopians,” and dismissed their visions as dreamy and unrealistic. For Marx, society was made up of classes: When certain classes controlled the means of production, they used that power to exploit the labor class.

In their 1848 work *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx and his collaborator, Friedrich Engels, argued that true “scientific socialism” could be established only after a revolutionary class struggle, with the workers emerging on top.

Though Marx died in 1883, his influence on socialist thought only grew after his death. His ideas were [taken up and expanded upon](#) by various political parties (such as the German Social Democratic Party) and leaders like [Vladimir Lenin](#) and [Mao Zedong](#).

Marx’s emphasis on the revolutionary clash between capital and labor came to dominate most socialist thought, but other brands of socialism continued to develop. Christian socialism, or collective societies formed around Christian religious principles. Anarchism saw not just capitalism but government as harmful and unnecessary. Social democracy held that socialist aims could be achieved through gradual political reform rather than revolution.

Socialism in the 20th Century

In the 20th century—particularly after the [Russian Revolution](#) of 1917 and the formation of the Soviet Union—social democracy and communism emerged as the two most dominant socialist movements throughout the world.

By the end of the 1920s, Lenin's revolution-focused view of socialism had given way to the foundation of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and its consolidation of absolute power under [Joseph Stalin](#). Soviet and other communists joined forces with other socialist movements in resisting fascism. After [World War II](#), this alliance dissolved as the Soviet Union established communist regimes across Eastern Europe.

With the collapse of these regimes in the late 1980s, and the ultimate [fall of the Soviet Union](#) itself in 1991, communism as a global political force was greatly diminished. Only China, Cuba, North Korea, Laos and Vietnam remain communist states.

Meanwhile, over the course of the 20th century, social democratic parties won support in many European countries by pursuing a more centrist ideology. Their ideas called for a gradual pursuit of social reforms (like public education and universal healthcare) through the processes of democratic government within a largely capitalist system.

Socialism in the United States

In the United States, the Socialist Party never enjoyed the same success as in Europe, reaching its peak of support in 1912, when Eugene V. Debs won 6 percent of the vote in that year's presidential election. But social reform programs like [Social Security](#) and Medicare, which opponents once denounced as socialist, became over time a well-accepted part of American society.

Some liberal politicians in the United States have embraced a variation on social democracy known as democratic socialism. This

calls for following socialist models in Scandinavia, Canada, Great Britain and other nations, including single-payer health care, free college tuition and higher taxes on the wealthy.

On the other side of the political spectrum, conservative U.S. politicians often label such policies as communist. They point to authoritarian socialist regimes such as that of Venezuela to raise concerns about big government.

The wide range of interpretations and definitions of socialism across the political spectrum, and the lack of a common understanding of what socialism is or how it looks in practice reflects its complicated evolution. Nonetheless, socialist parties and ideas continue to influence policy in nations around the world. And socialism's persistence speaks to the enduring appeal of calling for a more egalitarian society.

Communist Manifesto

The "Manifesto of the Communist Party" was written by Marx and Engels as the Communist League's programme on the instruction of its Second Congress (London, November 29-December 8, 1847), which signified a victory for the followers of a new proletarian line during the discussion of the programme questions.

When Congress was still in preparation, Marx and Engels arrived at the conclusion that the final programme document should be in the form of a Party manifesto (see Engels' letter to Marx of November 23-24, 1847). The catechism form usual for the secret societies of the time and retained in the "Draft of a Communist Confession of Faith" and "Principles of Communism," was not suitable for a full and substantial exposition of the new revolutionary world outlook, for a comprehensive formulation of the proletarian movement's aims and tasks. See also "Demands of the Communist Party in Germany," issued by Marx soon after publication of the *Manifesto*, which addressed the immediate demands of the movement. Marx and

Engels began working together on the *Manifesto* while they were still in London immediately after the congress, and continued until about December 13 when Marx returned to Brussels; they resumed their work four days later (December 17) when Engels arrived there. After Engels' departure for Paris at the end of December and up to his return on January 31, Marx worked on the Manifesto alone

A spectre is haunting Europe – the spectre of communism. All the powers of old Europe have entered into a holy alliance to exorcise this spectre. Two things result from this fact:

I. Communism is already acknowledged by all European powers to be itself a power.

II. It is high time that Communists should openly, in the face of the whole world, publish their views, their aims, their tendencies, and meet this nursery tale of the Spectre of Communism with a manifesto of the party itself.

To this end, Communists of various nationalities have assembled in London and sketched the following manifesto, to be published in the English, French, German, Italian, Flemish and Danish languages.

Bourgeois and Proletarians

The history of all previously 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.

Bourgeois

A sociologically-defined [social class](#), especially in contemporary times, referring to people with a certain [cultural](#) and [financial capital](#) belonging to the middle or [upper middle class](#): the upper (*haute*), middle (*moyenne*), and [petty](#) (*petite*) bourgeoisie (which are collectively designated "the bourgeoisie"); an affluent and often opulent stratum of the [middle class](#) who stand opposite the [proletariat](#) class.

Proletarians

The **proletariat** ([/ˌprɒlɪˈtɛəriət/](#) from [Latin](#) *proletarius* "producing offspring") is the [class](#) of [wage-earners](#) in an economic society whose only possession of significant material value is their [labour-power](#) (how much work they can do).^[1] A member of such a class is a **proletarian**.

[Marxist theory](#) considers the proletariat to be oppressed by [capitalism](#) and the wage system. This oppression gives the proletariat common economic and political interests that transcend national boundaries. These common interests put the proletariat in a position to unite and take power away from the capitalist class (see [dictatorship of the proletariat](#)), in order to create a [communist](#) society free from class distinctions.

Proletarians and Communists

In what relation do the Communists stand to the proletarians as a whole? The Communists do not form a separate party opposed to the other working-class parties. They have no interests separate and apart from those of the proletariat as a whole. They do not set up any sectarian principles of their own, by which to shape and mould the proletarian movement. The Communists are distinguished from the other working-class parties by this only: 1. In the national struggles of the proletarians of the different countries, they point out and bring to the front the common interests of the entire proletariat, independently of all nationality. 2. In the various stages of development which the

struggle of the working class against the bourgeoisie has to pass through, they always and everywhere represent the interests of the movement as a whole.

The Communists, therefore, are on the one hand, practically, the most advanced and resolute section of the working-class parties of every country, that section which pushes forward all others; on the other hand, theoretically, they have over the great mass of the proletariat the advantage of clearly understanding the line of march, the conditions, and the ultimate general results of the proletarian movement. The immediate aim of the Communists is the same as that of all other proletarian parties: formation of the proletariat into a class, overthrow of the bourgeois supremacy, conquest of political power by the proletariat. The theoretical conclusions of the Communists are in no way based on ideas or principles that have been invented, or discovered, by this or that would-be universal reformer.