

# Socialism



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The term socialism is commonly used to refer both to an ideology—a comprehensive set of beliefs or ideas about the nature of human society and its

future desirable state—and to a state of society based on that ideology.

Socialists have always claimed to stand above all for the values of equality, social justice, cooperation, progress, and individual freedom and happiness, and

they have generally sought to realize these values by the abolition of the private-enterprise economy (see CAPITALISM) and its replacement by “public

ownership,” a system of social or state control over production and distribution.

Methods of transformation advocated by socialists range from constitutional change to violent revolution.

## ORIGINS OF SOCIALISM

Some scholars believe that the basic principles of socialism were derived from

the philosophy of Plato, the teachings of the Hebrew prophets, and some parts of

the New Testament (the Sermon on the Mount, for example). Modern socialist

ideology, however, is essentially a joint product of the 1789 French Revolution

and the Industrial Revolution in England—the word socialist first occurred in an English journal in 1827. These two great historical events, establishing democratic government in France and the conditions for vast future economic

expansion in England, also engendered a state of incipient conflict between the

property owners (the bourgeoisie) and the growing class of industrial workers;

socialists have since been striving to eliminate or at least mitigate this

conflict. The first socialist movement emerged in France after the Revolution

and was led by Francois BABEUF, Filippo Buonarrotti (1761-1837), and Louis

Auguste BLANQUI; Babeuf's revolt of 1796 was a failure. Other early socialist

thinkers, such as the comte de SAINT-SIMON, Charles FOURIER, and Etienne CABET

in France and Robert OWEN and William Thompson (c. 1785-1833) in England,

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believed in the possibility of peaceful and gradual transformation to a socialist society by the founding of small experimental communities; hence, later socialist writers dubbed them with the label utopian.

## THE EMERGENCE OF MARXISM

In the mid-19th century, more-elaborate socialist theories were developed, and

eventually relatively small but potent socialist movements spread. The German

thinkers Karl MARX and Friedrich ENGELS produced at that time what has since

been generally regarded as the most sophisticated and influential doctrine of socialism. Marx, who was influenced in his youth by German idealist philosophy

and the humanism of Ludwig Andreas FEUERBACH, believed that human beings, and

particularly workers, were “ alienated” in modern capitalist society; he argued

in his early writings that the institution of private property would have to be completely abolished before the individual could be reconciled with both society

and nature. His mature doctrine, however, worked out in collaboration with Engels and based on the teachings of classical English political economy, struck

a harder note, and Marx claimed for it “ scientific” status.

The first important document of mature MARXISM, the COMMUNIST MANIFESTO (1848),

written with Engels, asserted that all known human history is essentially the history of social classes locked in conflict. There has in the past always been a ruling and an oppressed class. The modern, or bourgeois, epoch, characterized

by the capitalist mode of production with manufacturing industry and a free market, would lead according to Marx and Engels to the growing intensity of the

struggle between capitalists and workers (the proletariat), the latter being progressively impoverished and as a result assuming an increasingly revolutionary attitude.

Marx further asserted, in his most famous work, Das KAPITAL, that the capitalist

employer of labor had, in order to make a profit, to extract “ surplus value”

from his employees, thereby exploiting them and reducing them to “ wage-slavery.”

The modern state, with its government and law-enforcing agencies, was solely the

executive organ of the capitalist class. Religion, philosophy, and most other forms of culture likewise simply fulfilled the “ ideological” function of making the working class contented with their subordinate position. Capitalism, however,

as Marx claimed, would soon and necessarily grind to a halt: economic factors,

such as the diminishing rate of profit, as well as the political factor of

increasing proletarian “ class consciousness” would result in the forcible overthrow of the existing system and its immediate replacement by the

“ dictatorship of the proletariat.” This dictatorship would soon be superseded by

the system of socialism, in which private ownership is abolished and all people

are remunerated according to their work, and socialism would lead eventually to

COMMUNISM, a society of abundance characterized by the complete disappearance of

the state, social classes, law, politics, and all forms of compulsion. Under

this ideal condition goods would be distributed according to need, and the unity

of all humankind would be assured because of elimination of greed.

#### VARIETIES OF EUROPEAN SOCIALISM

Marxist ideas made a great impact on European socialist movements. By the second

half of the 19th century socialists in Europe were organizing into viable

political parties with considerable and growing electoral support; they also

forged close links in most countries with trade unions and other working-class

associations. Their short-term programs were mainly concerned with increasing

the franchise, introducing state welfare benefits for the needy, gaining the

right to strike, and improving working conditions, especially shortening the

work day.

#### Moderate Socialism

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Ideas other than those of Marx were at this time also becoming influential.

Such

ideas included moderate socialist doctrines, for example, those of the

FABIAN

SOCIETY in England, founded by Sidney WEBB and including among its

adherents the

writers H. G. Wells and George Bernard Shaw; those of Ferdinand LASSALLE

in

Germany; and of Louis BLANC in France. These moderates sought to achieve

socialism by parliamentary means and by appealing deliberately to the

middle

class. Fabianism had as one of its intellectual forebears the utilitarian

individualism of Jeremy BENTHAM and John Stuart MILL, and it became a

doctrine

that sought to reconcile the values of liberty, democracy, economic progress,

and social justice. The Fabians believed that the cause of socialism would

also

be aided by the advancement of the social sciences, especially economics

and

sociology. These doctrines, collectively known as social democracy, did not,



like Marxism, look toward the complete abolition of private property and the disappearance of the state but instead envisaged socialism more as a form of

society in which full democratic control would be exercised over wealth, and production would be controlled by a group of responsible experts working in the

interests of the whole community. The achievement of socialism was seen by social democrats as a long-term goal, the result of an evolutionary process involving the growth of economic efficiency (advanced technology, large-scale

organization, planning), education in moral responsibility, and the voluntary acceptance of equal shares in benefits and burdens; socialism would be the triumph of common sense, the inevitable outcome of LIBERALISM, the extension of

democracy from politics to industry.

CHRISTIAN SOCIALISM spread from its beginnings in England to France and Germany.

Charles KINGSLEY, John Malcolm Forbes Ludlow (1821-1911), and Frederick Denison

MAURICE were among its founders. They in the main supported moderate social

democracy, emphasizing what they understood as the central message of the church

in social ethics, notably the values of cooperation, brotherhood, simplicity of tastes, and the spirit of self-sacrifice. Their ideas proved fertile in both the short and the long runs, although in actual political terms Christian socialism never succeeded in altering the predominantly secular orientation of most socialist movements.

### Radical Socialism

On the other hand, many doctrines and movements were decidedly more militant

than Marxism. Anarchists (see ANARCHISM), influenced mainly by the ideas of the

Frenchman Pierre Joseph PROUDHON and later of the Russian emigres Mikhail

Aleksandrovich BAKUNIN and Pyotr Alekseyevich KROPOTKIN, were intent on immediately overthrowing the capitalist state and replacing it with small independent communities. Unlike the Marxists, whom they bitterly criticized,

anarchists were against the formation of socialist parties, and they repudiated

parliamentary politics as well as the idea of revolutionary dictatorship. Their followers, never very numerous, were and are found mainly in the Latin countries

of Europe and America. SYNDICALISM, an offshoot of anarchism, was a movement of

militant working-class trade unionists who endeavored to achieve socialism through industrial action only, notably by using the weapon of the general strike. Their doctrine was similar to Marxism in that they also believed that socialism was to be achieved only by and for the working class, but unlike the

Marxists they rejected the notion of a future centralized socialist state. Their most eminent theorist was Georges SOREL. Syndicalist ideas also had intermittent

success in the British and American trade union movements, for example, the

INDUSTRIAL WORKERS OF THE WORLD, an American-based syndicalist union active

around the turn of the century. Guild socialism in England, dominated by George

Douglas Howard Cole (1889-1959), the academic economist and historian, represented a modified and milder form of syndicalism.

In Russia, where it was impossible to organize openly a popular socialist movement under the tsarist regime, socialism became mainly the ideology of young

militant intellectuals whose favored means of furthering the cause were secret

conspiracies and acts of individual terrorism. Debate raged between those who

believed in the native socialist ethos of the Russian village community and

those who wanted to adopt Western ideas of modernization. The latter party,

which eventually emerged victorious, soon came under Marxist influence.

Among

its adherents was V. I. LENIN, who emerged as the leader of a small but

dedicated group of “ professional revolutionaries,” the Bolshevik (see

BOLSHEVIKS

AND MENSHEVIKS) wing of the illegal Russian Social Democratic Workers’ party.

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Lenin was also the theorist who irrevocably gave a markedly elitist and authoritarian twist to Marxism: he worked out the theory of the proletarian vanguard—that is, the Communist party—which was destined to lead the masses toward socialism, irrespective of the masses' inclinations.

### SCHISM AND CONTROVERSY

Throughout the 19th century the socialist movement was beset by a number of ever-deepening conflicts and doctrinal controversies.

#### The Internationals

The International Workingmen's Association (First International; see INTERNATIONAL, SOCIALIST), founded in 1864, was expected to achieve unity among various socialist and militant trade union organizations, but its efforts were greatly hindered by, among other things, the conflict between the followers of Bakunin and those of Marx. It came to an end soon after the suppression of the COMMUNE OF PARIS (1871).

The Second International (1889-1914) assumed for a time at least an outward

appearance of unity, in that it represented the high watermark of classical

Marxist influence in West European socialism. It was dominated by the largest

socialist parties then in existence, the French—led by Jean JAURES, Jules

Guesde (1845-1922), and Paul Lafargue (1842-1911)—and the German—led by August

BEBEL, Karl Johann KAUTSKY, and Wilhelm Liebknecht (see LIEBKNECHT family)—who

agreed at least in their broad understanding of the aims and methods of

socialism. Their spokesmen emphasized the need to foster international

solidarity among the mass of the working class and thus to avert the threat of a

major war in Europe. This effort proved singularly unsuccessful:

NATIONALISM in

1914 and later proved a much stronger mass emotion than socialism. Apart from a

few exceptions, such as Lenin and his Bolshevik group, socialist movements

supported the war effort of their respective governments. As a result of the

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general conflagration in 1914 the Second International disintegrated and therewith also the hopes of socialist unity.

### Revisionism

Another important controversy broke out in the 1890s within Marxism, involving

the German Social Democratic party. This party was divided then between a militant revolutionary left wing, an orthodox center that held to the classical Marxist doctrine of economic determinism, and a right wing moving rapidly toward

a position of open reformism. The right wing had as its most renowned spokesman

Eduard BERNSTEIN, a personal friend of Marx and Engels, who was, however, also

influenced by English Fabian ideas.

Bernstein repudiated the notion of violent revolution and argued that conditions

in civilized countries such as Germany made possible a peaceful, gradual

transformation to socialism. He sought to reinterpret Marxist doctrine in the

light of fresh advances made in economic science, such as those also embraced in

Fabian doctrine, and argued that socialism was compatible with individual economic responsibility. He rejected, furthermore, the idea of “ class morality,”

which judged all actions according to their revolutionary import. Instead he advocated a code of individual morality, derived from Kant’s moral philosophy.

Consequently, Bernstein asserted the need for socialists to concentrate on immediate tasks instead of ultimate and remote objectives; the movement, he wrote, was everything; the goal, nothing.

This doctrine, henceforward called revisionism, immediately became the subject

of bitter attacks by the revolutionary left wing, represented above all by Rosa

LUXEMBURG, which on this issue was supported by the orthodox center and its

principal theorist, Karl Kautsky. The terms of the debate on revisionism



centered on the facts, noted by Bernstein, of considerable improvement in the

living standards of the working class, its resultant political integration in the constitutional (republican or monarchical) state, the purely reformist stance of trade unions, and the virtual absence of any desire for a radical change on the part of the great majority of workers.

The opponents of revisionism, while acknowledging these tendencies, argued that

material improvements were insufficient and ephemeral. They felt that if the working class and its organizations accepted the constitutional state they were

merely postponing indefinitely the change to socialism. According to them, the

principal tasks of the socialist leader are to arouse dissatisfaction with existing conditions and to reemphasize constantly the worth of the ultimate goal.

The arguments on both sides continue with only slight changes in the debate between reformist and revolutionary socialists everywhere. In Marxist jargon the

term revisionism became synonymous with treason. Ironically—but in a way that

pointed toward the subsequent fate of Marxist doctrine—the orthodox center in

the German party was soon to be denounced by left-wingers as revisionist. Lenin,

too, came to condemn sharply the German social democrats and the “renegade”

Kautsky. The latter, in turn, vehemently denounced Lenin and the Bolsheviks for

their adoption of terrorist methods in the consolidation of their revolutionary

gains in Russia. Marxist unity, like the Second International, thus also fell

victim to World War I and its aftermath: from then on Marxists have tended to be

either Marxist-Leninists—that is, communists embracing the elitist doctrine of the vanguard party—or moderate revisionists moving ever closer to reformist social democracy.

## MODERN MARXIST SOCIALISM

Modern socialism owes its shape and fortune at least as much to secular events

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as to the continuing attraction of its various doctrines. The major upheavals caused by two world wars greatly contributed to the success of the Russian (1917) and Chinese (1949) revolutions, and the governments of these two powerful countries thereafter endeavored by diverse means to spread the Marxist revolutionary doctrine further afield, resorting to military methods (as in Eastern Europe), economic pressures, and military and economic aid, as well as subversion and propaganda. Indigenous Marxist movements also succeeded in gaining and maintaining power in Cuba (1959) and Nicaragua (1979). During most of the 20th century, Marxist socialism meant the dictatorial rule of the Communist party, intensive industrialization, central state direction of the economy, and the collectivization of agriculture. These were accompanied, particularly during the dictatorship of Joseph STALIN in the USSR, by a reign of terror and the general absence of individual freedom. The Stalinist system, though shorn of some of its worst brutalities, essentially remained in place

until the rise to power of Mikhail GORBACHEV in 1985. In a few short years, Gorbachev's policies of GLASNOST (openness) and PERESTROIKA (restructuring)

created irresistible demands for liberalization in both the USSR and Eastern Europe. As the Soviet regime loosened its grip, the countries of Eastern Europe

threw off the Communist governments that had been imposed on them after World

War II. In the USSR itself long-cherished doctrines of Leninism were jettisoned

with bewildering speed, and, following an abortive coup by party hard-liners in

1991, the Soviet regime collapsed.

#### EUROPEAN SOCIAL DEMOCRACY

In Western Europe, despite the presence of large Marxist parties (as in Italy and France) and the Marxist influence among intellectuals, socialism was, and

still is, principally represented by widely based social democratic and labor movements, which generally enjoy the active support of trade unions. This

predominance of reformist trends over revolutionary aspirations undoubtedly was

occasioned by economic stability and the deterrent example of Marxist rule in

the East. The social democratic parties of Sweden, Britain, France, and the

Federal Republic of Germany (the former West Germany and present reunified

state), in particular, governed their respective countries for lengthy periods

during the postwar era through constitutional means, fully accepting the

principles of parliamentary liberal democracy. The spirit of these Western

European parties has tended to be pragmatic and tolerant, seeking accommodation

rather than confrontation. Their programs repudiate the doctrines of the class

war, revolution, and communism. Instead, they have relied on the expedients of

progressive taxation, deficit financing, selective nationalization, the mixed

economy, and vast welfare programs in order to bring about socialism; their

political success has depended on considerable middle-class support.

Although

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most of these parties have recently accommodated themselves to free-market

reforms, they remain committed to the social democratic vision of a “middle way”

between the extremes of communism and unfettered capitalism.

Social democratic foreign policy has generally been pacific and until recently was mainly concerned with defusing the cold war and accelerating the processes

of decolonization and the banning of nuclear weapons. In domestic politics,

European social democrats generally refused to cooperate with communist parties

and other extremist socialist groups. The Social Democratic party (SPD) in

Germany, although at one time the citadel of orthodox Marxism, has since 1959

been a purely reformist party, abandoning its original goals. The British LABOUR

PARTY, socialist in its aims (its constitution since 1919 has had reference to

“public ownership”), has never had any serious doctrinal or organizational links

with Marxism, although its powerful left wing consistently advocates radical

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policies. A dispute with the leftists prompted a group of Labour moderates to secede (1981) and found the Social Democratic party, which later merged (1988)

with the Liberal party to form the Social and Liberal Democrats (later, Liberal Democrats). The French Socialist party, which had long since abandoned its orthodox Marxism, allied itself with the Communists during the 1960s, but under

the leadership of Francois MITTERRAND, it won the presidency on its own and

gained a majority in the National Assembly in 1981. In the same year, the Greek

Socialists came to power under Andreas PAPANDREOU, and in 1982, Felipe GONZALEZ

MARQUEZ formed Spain's first Socialist government since the Spanish Civil War.

Bettino CRAXI became Italy's first Socialist premier, heading a coalition government from 1983 to 1987. Although Scandinavia's social democrats suffered

electoral defeats in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the political parties of Europe's moderate left retained broad popular support.

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The French Communist party was long known for its subservience to the USSR and

its rigid Stalinism. The Italian Communist party, on the other hand, relied on an indigenous Marxist tradition associated mainly with the teaching of Antonio

GRAMSCI, one of the party's founders, who is widely regarded as one of the most

significant of European Marxist thinkers. The Italian party, at one time the largest in Western Europe, frequently obtained the highest percentage of the popular vote in Italy's parliamentary elections and continuously governed a number of Italian municipalities (Bologna is a prime example).

During the 1970s the Italian Communists under Enrico BERLINGUER, the French

Communists under Georges Marchais, and the Spanish Communists under Santiago

Carillo embraced a doctrine known as Eurocommunism. The Eurocommunists, breaking

not only with Stalinism but with some aspects of the Leninist tradition, began moving toward full acceptance of parliamentary democracy and the multiparty

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system, in many ways prefiguring the glasnost-perestroika reforms that dramatically changed the Communist world in the Gorbachev era. To the left of

the Communists were a number of new groups of militant revolutionaries, such as

West Germany's Red Army (Baader-Meinhof) Faction and Italy's Red Brigades, which

carried out campaigns of abduction, subversion, and terrorism in the 1970s and

1980s.

## SOCIALISM IN THE UNITED STATES

In North America, Marxist influence never spread very far. In the United States

no socialist movement ever held a very large following, and although the country

has produced renowned socialist authors and popular leaders, they have not been

distinguished for their originality or for their impact on the worldwide

development of socialism. Socialism has not taken a firmer root in the United States for several reasons, of which the country's cultural traditions and its

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wealth in natural resources are the most important. Whereas in Europe the distribution of wealth was a pressing problem, facilitating the rise of socialist movements, in the United States the moving " frontier" meant the constant creation of new land and wealth and its accessibility for those endowed with initiative and a spirit of individual enterprise. Thus in the United States even radical thinkers tended to be " individualists" and " anarchists," rather than socialists. In this development the country's tradition of republican self-government and its ethos of egalitarianism and democracy also played a decisive role: unlike Europe, the United States had no entrenched aristocratic privileges or monarchical absolutism and consequently no need for democratic aspirations to be combined with the socialist demand for economic equality and security.

LABOR UNIONS also, for the most part, concentrated on the achievement of higher earnings and were not greatly interested in economic and social organization.

Numerous, although small, utopian socialist communities did flourish, however,

in the United States, mostly during the early 19th century. Also, a celebrated economist, Henry GEORGE, and writers of repute, such as Edward BELLAMY, advocated socialism, and socialist political leaders, such as Victor L. BERGER, Eugene V. DEBS, Daniel DE LEON, and Norman THOMAS, had at one time considerable

popular appeal. The U. S. SOCIALIST PARTY, founded in 1901, reached its greatest

strength in the 1912 and 1920 presidential elections, when its candidate, Debs,

received more than 900, 000 votes. In 1932, Norman Thomas, running on the

Socialist ticket, polled more than 800, 000 votes. Thereafter the party's strength ebbed. The New Deal in the 1930s, although not socialist in inspiration,

also tended to draw votes away from the party. The New Deal's policies of economic redistribution seemed to meet demands of those who previously supported

the Socialists.

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In the economic boom following World War II and especially in the cold-war era

of the 1950s and 1960s, U. S. socialism was at a low ebb. Later, however, socialist ideas made considerable, although indirect, impacts on various radical

(see RADICALISM) and liberal movements. In the United States many people no

longer discuss socialism in its conventional political and economic sense, but rather as a remote ethical and social ideal.

#### SOCIALISM IN THE THIRD WORLD

Socialism has assumed a number of distinct forms in the Third World. But only in

Israel has moderate social democracy proved successful for long periods, mainly

as a result of the European socialist tradition brought in by immigrants.

There

the Labor party in various forms has had a large following and has governed the

country longer than any other party. Israel has other socialist parties as well, including a militant Marxist party. At least of equal significance, however, are

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the cooperative agricultural communes (kibbutzim), which have flourished since

1948. Commentators have argued that kibbutzim more than anything else show the

viability of socialist principles in practice; however, the peculiarities of

Israeli conditions (for example, religious tradition and constant war readiness

necessitated by the hostility of Israel's Arab neighbors) could not easily be

duplicated.

Elsewhere in the Third World, Marxism and various indigenous traditions

have

been predominant in socialist movements. In developing countries socialism

as an

ideology generally has been fused with various doctrines of nationalism, also

a

European cultural import but enriched by diverse motifs drawn from local

traditions and cast in the idiom of indigenous cultures. In India, for example,

the largest socialist movement has partially adapted the pacifist teaching of

Mahatma Gandhi, and distinct native brands of socialism exist in Japan,

Burma

(Myanmar), and Indonesia. Similarly, in black Africa native traditions were used

in the adaptation of socialist, mainly Marxist, doctrines and political systems based on them. Noteworthy instances were the socialist system of Tanzania

(decentralized under an internationally supported economic reform program of the

early 1990s) and the socialist theories of intellectual leaders such as Kwame NKRUMAH of Ghana, Julius K. NYERERE of Tanzania, Leopold Sedar SENGHOR of

Senegal, and Sekou TOURE of Guinea. Socialism in these theories is usually understood as a combination of Marxism, anticolonialism, and the updated tradition of communal landownership and tribal customs of decision making. Most

of sub-Saharan Africa's socialist countries adopted free-market reforms in the

late 1980s and early 1990s.

Arab socialism likewise represents an effort to combine modern European socialist ideology with some Islamic principles. The BAATH PARTY in Iraq and

Syria and the Destour party in Tunisia have held power for considerable periods;

Algeria also has had a socialist system since its independence. In the Third World, however, socialism has often been simply an ideology of anticolonialism

and modernization. Overtly Marxist movements, aided by the USSR, China, or Cuba,

nevertheless seized power in such African countries as Angola, Ethiopia, and Mozambique. South Africa's AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS (ANC) was also strongly

influenced by Marxist ideas.

#### THE NEW LEFT

In the West in the 1960s a radical socialist movement, known as the New Left,

arose principally out of the disaffection of young people with the way of life of advanced industrial society, and not least with its prosperity and conformism.

The movement, which was apolitical in nature, sought to expose the growing "alienation" of the individual in advanced industrial conditions, castigating

the values of the “ consumer society” and attacking many prevailing social institutions. The beliefs of this movement, particularly strong in France, West Germany, and the United States, sprang from many diverse sources. Most important

among these were the ideas found in Marx’s early writings; the idea of “ alienation,” as interpreted by such contemporary socialist philosophers as Gyorgy LUKACS and Herbert MARCUSE; EXISTENTIALISM; romantic and utopian ideas

adapted from earlier socialist writers (for example, Fourier); sexual radicalism

derived from the teaching of Sigmund Freud; and some aspects of Eastern religious traditions, such as ZEN BUDDHISM. Despite its initial appeal and successes, however, the New Left did not prove to be a significant or lasting influence on socialism in its worldwide context or even within advanced industrial societies where conventional varieties still dominated.

It could well be argued that socialism as an alternative system of society and government failed to live up to its promises; by and large it is today no more than a dream or at best a set of ideal criteria whereby to judge the



shortcomings of existing institutions. Socialist ideology, however, remains a popular and