

What Is Socialism?

The Promises of Revolution

Rich landowners and merchants in America and France resented the taxes and corruption of their kings (military dictatorships) and wanted to control the power of the State [Army, Police, and Bureaucracy; –Michael Bakunin] for their own profits. To convince the poor and working people of their countries to fight a revolution for their purposes, they published propaganda promising “Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness”, “Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité”, *etc.* *Shortly after the revolutions were won, the rich created a system where only they had the power to vote and called out the army to suppress the workers and their demands.* The revolutionary idea in America was carried by French troops back to France, where it was spread around Europe and its colonies in the Napoleonic Wars (also, inspiring peasant and slave revolts). Working people were hungry for the political and economic liberty which they had been denied. Many people migrated to America and European colonies looking for liberty and economic opportunity, only to join the growing poor and working classes created by the Industrial Revolution and war.

The Social Question

Capitalism was based on profits from colonialism, slavery, and drug trafficking. Rich landlords and kings stole the land historically worked by farmers and forced those who couldn't afford to pay rent to move to the cities, to colonies, or to new industrial work. Capitalists exploited the “Calvinist work ethic” of rural farm families (*e.g.*, in New England) to recruit low paid workers for their new factories where worker safety was not a priority, but speed and profit were. Cotton and textiles was an early boom industry in America and England. To scare workers, poverty was made a crime and employers kept enough people out of work, waiting for someone to get fired for no reason so they could fight for that job, that they were called “the army of the unemployed”. The result was an explosion of poverty, crime, disease, and other social problems in cities where people struggled to survive.

The rich blamed the growing problems on a natural “immorality” among poor people and advocated “law and order”, prisons, and allowing the poor to starve (Thomas Malthus). The socialists observed that *people were products of their environment*, that social mores and other values are socialized (learned) behavior, and that those not afforded to maintain well-being by work and productive means under the social system, would try to survive by any means available. Capitalism (the social system) made the rich richer, and the poor poorer, and concentrated wealth and power in the hands of a small ruling class who created corporations and monopolies to control the economy, and used their money to control governments, laws, and the State. Corporate industrialism undercut traditional craftman (craft labor) workplaces, like blacksmiths, and replaced them with machines (automation), assembly lines, and repetitive work tasks. Decisionmaking and technical knowledge were taken from workers and given to Middle Class managers, engineers, and supervisors. Everyone else was then paid just enough to keep from starving. Workers who got sick or injured (or complained) were fired and replaced. In the U.S., laws were passed to encourage recruiting of Eastern European and Asian immigrants as “replacement workers” (but they were not allowed to bring their families). Slavery

was abolished to allow industrial capitalists to take over slave-based industries (*e.g.*, U.S. Civil War), and create even more replacement workers. Capitalism used race, gender and youth as a pretext to pay workers less for their labor and denied these people equal rights under the law.

The Chicago Idea

Many immigrants to the U.S. stepped off the boat into industrial slums, but others were immediately recruited to fight in the Union Army. The U.S. Civil War has the unintended consequence of creating *esprit d'corp* (solidarity) among military veterans. After the war, unemployed veterans from the north and south moved to Chicago and other industrializing cities looking for work. They met new immigrants also looking for work. Chicago was an industrial center and railroad hub on the edge of the western frontier; bustling with economic development (and some of the worst excesses and abuses of capitalist employers and landlords) after the war.

Immigrant ethnic groups often lived in the same communities and worked in the same industries, so workers with problems *cooperated* rather than competing with each other. When employers tried to cheat them out of wages, kept unsafe working conditions, or proposed layoffs, workers organized themselves into Workers Organizations which became labor unions. When the capitalists tried to use the State government against them, they ran socialist political candidates and won! When the state government passed a law for an 8-hour work day, capitalists ignored it and rigged future elections to keep immigrant workers from power. Workers were left with *direct action and solidarity* between Workers Organizations (*e.g.*, general strike, sympathy strike, self-defense) as their only means to address their grievances. The capitalists armed the Chicago cops with Gatling guns and cannon to use against the unions. Where industrial actions succeeded, capitalists sometimes hired gangsters (“detectives”), or had the government call out the Army, to murder women and children on the picket lines.

Class War

After the revolutions of 1848 and the U.S. Civil War, workers organized trade unions, published newspapers and went on speaking tours to spread socialist ideas about liberty and equality, and organized the International Workingmens Association (inspired by the fight for the 8-hour work day) to foster international cooperation between organizers and workers organizations (internationalism). Socialists were early proponents of ethnic and gender equality, supporters of public education, and opponents of child labor. They opposed monopoly capitalism, plutocracy and imperialism. When capitalist controlled governments threatened to go to war, socialists opposed militarism as a threat to the life, liberty, and economic well-being of working class people. Capitalists used right-wing vigilantes and cops against socialist organizers and some tried to make socialism illegal.

Libertarian Socialism

Libertarian or Anarchist Socialism is the Anti-Authoritarian wing of the socialist movement inspired by Michael Bakunin, and opposed to Karl Marx’s “dictatorship of the proletariat” and reformist “social democratic” political parties. The term “An-archist” (from greek *αν - αρχος* for “without-leader”) was first used in the French Revolution for those who would not submit to the dictatorship of “the terror”. Libertarian (Anarchist) Socialists advocate free association, self-management, and do-it-yourself organizing instead of leaders, bosses and corrupt politicians; direct action instead of lobbying and laws; and, mutual aid and solidarity between workers and their communities instead of competition, privation, and the social welfare state. We want to abolish Capitalism *and* the State in favor of democratic workers institutions in the workplace and community.