

Society and Politics to WWI

Second Industrial Revolution

The growth of industrialism between 1860 and 1914 increased Europe's productive capacity and population growth to unparalleled levels. The proportion of Europeans in the world's total population, at 20%, was higher in 1900 than ever before. After 1900 the birth rate and death rate in Europe stabilized, while rapid population growth continued in the developing world. A new demographic phenomenon of the 20th century would be the consistent population stability in developed countries and rapidly expanding populations in undeveloped countries. Europeans migrated to other parts of the globe in unprecedented numbers due to European economic and technological superiority. The "*Europeanization*" of the globe technologically, economically, and politically continued.

The last quarter of the 19th century experienced unparalleled technological and industrial expansion, which is now referred to as the *Second Industrial Revolution*. The First Industrial Revolution of the late 18th century was associated with textiles, steam, and iron. The Second Industrial Revolution of the late 19th century was associated with *steel, chemicals, electricity, and finally oil*. Germany became a major industrial power, ultimately surpassing Great Britain in the production of steel. A direct link was formed between science and industrial development. The application of electric energy to production was the most significant change. The manufacturing of steel was improved, the internal combustion engine was used to invent the automobile, and petroleum companies supplied the growing demand for oil and other chemical by-products.

Capital investment experienced increases and decreases as the market fluctuated, but the general standard of living improved in the industrialized countries. The word "unemployment" was coined and labor unrest during economic downturns continued to fuel the growth of trade unions and socialist political parties. *Consumerism* began to replace the role of capital investment in last quarter of the 19th century as a primary means of stimulating the economy. *Imperialism* enabled European consumer goods to be sold in new markets, which allowed production and employment to remain higher in Europe than it would have been.

Middle Class

After the revolutions of 1848, the middle-class rejected working-class demands for social and economic equality. The middle-class became the center of consumerism, and increasingly determined the values and the goals of society. The middle-class itself became increasingly diverse, and significant tensions between sub-groups within the middle-class emerged. Small shopkeepers resented department store owners, and those recently added to the middle-class experienced social anxiety that economic downturn would result in them losing their middle-class lifestyle. Increased *urbanization* continued across Europe and competition for jobs created numerous political, social, religious, and racial tensions.

Governments redesigned the central portions of many European cities during the second half of the 19th century to enhance economic growth and provide adequate sanitation and housing. The most extensive and famous transformation of a major city occurred in Paris. Napoleon III oversaw a vast urban reconstruction program that created broad boulevards and streets, and other public buildings. The middle-class desired neighborhoods separated from the congested urban center, and the working-class desired affordable housing. Thus, the development of the *suburbs* that surrounded the city's urban center. In the 1890s, construction on the Paris subway began and the use of subways and tramways allowed people to commute from the suburb to the city's urban center, making home and work more physically separated than ever before. The suburbs of Europe consisted of apartment buildings and small homes built closely together.

After the revolutions of 1848, the middle-class liberals and upper-class conservatives desired to maintain public order and issues of public health and housing for the poor were viewed as political problems to be solved through government. The best way to prevent working-class riots or revolution was to improve the living and working conditions of the working-class. Various reports were written to document the particular public health problems that needed be addressed, and the reports detailed just how horrible working-class areas of town actually were compared to middle-class areas. The construction of water and sewage systems became a major public project led by the government. Full acceptance of the bacterial theory of disease associated with the discoveries of Louis Pasteur and Joseph Lister made cleanliness a major public concern. The general maintenance of health resulted in the *government increasingly intervening in new areas of society*.

Middle-class reformers turned to housing reform to solve the medical, moral, and political dangers created by slums. The *social environment* became the main target of political reform because people believed that improving material conditions would lead to a healthy, moral, and politically stable population. Good housing would increase the likelihood of a good family life, which would increase the likelihood of hard-working, law-abiding citizens. Housing projects, whether in the form of apartment buildings or separate homes, were financed by both private philanthropy and government programs. Again, during the last two decades of the 19th century *laissez-faire* is being abandoned and government is intervening in economic and social life in a number of ways.

Labor, Socialism, and Politics of WWI

The industrial expansion of the late 19th century produced an increase in the *urban proletariat*. Unskilled labor continued to grow, while skilled labor continued to decline. The proletarianization of the workforce continued to worsen. After the failure of the revolutions of 1848, workers and wage-laborers joined trade unions, political parties, and socialist groups. Unions were legalized in Great Britain in 1871 and in France in 1884. The union represented for workers a new collective form of association for confronting economic and social hardship.

In the late 19th century, all of Europe gradually extended the franchise to include *universal male suffrage*. The broadened franchise meant that politicians could no longer ignore the rights and concerns of workers and that the working-class could voice its grievances and advocate for political reforms from within the institutions of government. *Violent revolution seemed unnecessary since reform appeared possible from within the political process*. The increase in democracy resulted in highly organized *mass political parties*. The largest single group in the electorate was the working-class. The liberals had to compete with the socialists for the support of the working-class. Socialism, as a political ideology, was often opposed to nationalism because the problems facing the working class crossed national boundaries. However, nationalism proved to have an emotional power that would divide the socialist parties of Europe during WWI.

Marx and the First International

In 1864, a group of British and French trade unions formed the International Working Men's Association, or the First International. Marx spoke on behalf of the First International and supported the efforts of labor to seek reform within the existing political and economic system. In his private writings, he still insisted on the overthrow of capitalism for theoretical reasons. In 1871, the French army crushed the Paris Commune, which Marx had considered a proletarian government, and the First International did not want to become associated with the failed experiment. The French government used the Paris Commune as an excuse to suppress socialist political organizations and the First International was dissolved by 1876.

Politically and philosophically, the First International established Marxism as the most important strand of socialism. The influence of anarchists and utopian socialists increasingly lost their influence due to the scientific rigor of Marx's social and economic analysis. German socialists continued to develop Marx's thought throughout the late 19th century, while non-Marxist socialists in Great Britain were forming the *Labour Party*. British socialism was non-Marxist, and the most influential socialist group was the *Fabian Society*, formed in 1884. The Fabian Society embraced a *gradualist* approach to major social reform. The leading members were Sidney and Beatrice Webb, and the writers H.G. Wells and George Bernard Shaw. The Fabians believed that gradual, peaceful, and democratic change could take place if people were educated about the rational benefits of socialism for society.

In Great Britain, the Conservative Party (previously Tories) became split over whether to finance social reform through higher import duties, while the Liberal Party (previously Whigs) began to pass social legislation to win the working-class from the Labour Party. The Liberal Party passed the National Insurance Act of 1911, which provided unemployment benefits and health care. The financing of the social legislation resulted in conflict between the Liberal House of Commons and Conservative House of Lords. The Parliament Act of 1911 gave the House of Commons the power to override the veto of the House of Lords. Liberalism had evolved in Britain from the

laissez-faire views of David Ricardo to embrace a *social welfare* vision that greatly expanded the role of government.

The Second International

The Second International was formed in 1889 and its leaders publicly rejected “*opportunism*,” which was the term given to the phenomenon of socialist politicians serving in liberal governments. For example, in France a debate was taking place between two factions of socialists over whether or not to pragmatically share power with the liberals or to remain theoretically dedicated to overthrowing the liberal, capitalist class. The Socialist Party of France ultimately rejected opportunism and became the second-largest party by 1914. The labor movement in France had deep roots in anarchism and tended to ignore political participation. The labor movement voted for socialist candidates, but typically sought to improve working conditions through direct action. The *general strike*, a tactic celebrated by Georges Sorel in *Reflections of Violence*, was more common in France than political reform from within the political process.

Social Democracy and Revisionism

The German Social Democratic Party (SPD) preserved and developed the Marxist tradition of socialism. The SPD was founded in 1875 and was divided by those who advocated reform and those who advocated revolution. Bismarck attempted to suppress the SPD and passed anti-socialist laws in the Reichstag. Yet, the SPD continued to grow in size and in power throughout the 1880s and 1890s. Bismarck, realizing that the socialists were popular, began to pass social legislation throughout the 1880s. Bismarck passed legislation to provide health insurance, old age pensions and disabilities pensions. Germany, in effect, had created a conservative alternative to socialism: *social security*.

The SPD formulated the Erfurt Program in 1891, which outlined the SPD plan to pursue the socialist ownership of the means of production through legal political participation rather than revolutionary activity. The leader of the SPD argued that because capitalism by its nature would collapse, the most appropriate task for socialists was to work for the improvement of workers’ lives. Essentially, the SPD theoretically believed in the collapse of capitalism, but decided to work within the political system to achieve reform rather than seek revolution to bring about the collapse of capitalism.

The debates within the SPD produced socialist *Revisionism*. Eduard Bernstein, who had spent time in Great Britain with the Fabians, questioned whether or not an adherence to orthodox Marxism was the best path forward politically for socialism. Some of the inner contradictions of capitalism that Marx had argued would result in its collapse had simply not developed. Furthermore, the overall standard of living within Europe was rising, ownership of capitalist industry was not resulting in monopoly, and the middle-class was not identifying with the working-class. Bernstein’s doctrines, which adapted Marxism to new social, political, and

economic circumstances, were referred to as Revisionism. Bernstein argued that social reform through democratic institutions should replace revolution as the path to a humane socialist society. The SPD began to approach politics in a much more practical manner modeled after the critique made by Bernstein and achieved significant electoral gains. The German socialists were also quite nationalistic, and controversially voted to support Germany's participation in WWI.

Russia and Bolshevism

During the last decade of the 19th century, industrialism came to Russia and with it major political discontent. Essentially, the political and economic changes that the rest of Europe had been slowly dealing with throughout the 19th century occurred at the same time and quite rapidly within Russia. Alexander III and Nicholas II were determined to make Russia a modern industrial power. They pursued policies of *planned economic development* that included protective tariffs, high taxes, and the gold standard. Meanwhile, the peasants remained indebted to the landowners despite the abolition of serfdom. Discontent in both the countryside and the emerging industrial cities was widespread. The political situation within Russia was vastly different from the rest of Europe because Russia had no representative institutions and a small working-class. Thus, socialists in Russia were convinced theoretically and practically that *revolutionary action* was the only means to political reform.

The Russian Social Democratic Party, formed in 1898, had to function in exile due to the repressive policies of the tsar. The Russian Social Democratic Party adopted a Marxist ideology and its leaders, Gregory Plekhanov and Vladimir Lenin, worked from Switzerland. Lenin was the son of a high-ranking government bureaucrat and his brother had been executed in 1887 for participating in a plot against Alexander III. Lenin studied law in St. Petersburg before being exiled to Siberia and then taking refuge in Switzerland. Once in Switzerland, Lenin was highly involved in the philosophical debates over how Marxism should apply to an *agrarian* country like Russia. Many of the Social Democrats were modernizers who actually favored further industrial development, both as a means to national strength and as a means to develop a large proletariat that would support their revolutionary goals. An opposing socialist vision provided by the Social Revolutionary Party, founded in 1901 with roots in the old Land and Freedom movement, rejected further industrialism in favor of an agricultural society. Lenin disagreed with both the Social Democrats and the Social Revolutionaries.

Lenin's *What Is to Be Done?* (1902) condemned the gradualism of the Social Democrats, criticized the short-term gains by the Fabians and Labour Party, and rejected the notion that a mass political party composed of the working-class was capable of developing a revolutionary consciousness on its own. He argued that an *intellectual elite* must bring revolutionary consciousness to the working-class and that an intellectual elite must lead the revolution. Thus, Lenin rejected both the orthodox Marxist view that revolution was inevitable and Bernstein's revisionist view that revolution could take place democratically. Lenin rejected Marx's argument

that the proletariat itself would carry out the revolution, and insisted that a revolutionary elite would be the main instrument in the overthrow of capitalism.

A debate ensued within the Russian Social Democratic Party between two factions. Lenin's faction assumed the name Bolsheviks (majority) and the moderate, democratic faction called the Mensheviks (minority). Lenin's organizational plan was to unite the proletariat and the peasantry in opposition to the tsar. The Bolsheviks were *very unpopular* with the other socialist parties throughout Europe and the Bolsheviks disapproved of the fact that other socialist parties worked within the existing political institutions. In other words, the socialists within Russia are very different from socialists in other countries.

Industrialism continued within Russia and Nicholas II went to war against Japan in 1904 in the hopes of uniting the country and gaining public support. Russia lost the war and the tsar faced an internal political crisis. On January 22, 1905 several hundred workers led by a priest went to the tsar's palace in St. Petersburg to present a petition seeking improved working conditions. The tsar's troops opened fire on the crowd and killed 100 people in what became known as Bloody Sunday. Peasant revolts erupted in the countryside, socialist groups organized urban workers, student strikes occurred at the universities, and the major political parties demanded political reforms. Nicholas II issued the October Manifesto promising a constitutional government. Elections to a representative body were held, but the tsar repeatedly called for new elections when the results were too liberal. Essentially, the tsar remained in power and no real reforms came to Russia until the Bolsheviks seized power in the Russian Revolution of 1917, which led to Russia withdrawing from WWI.