

European Socialism

A Concise History with Documents

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ROWMAN & LITTLEFIELD PUBLISHERS, INC.
Lanham • Boulder • New York • Toronto • Plymouth, UK

2014

THREE

Socialist Ideology amid Reform and Revolution, 1830–1870

The decades between the outbreak of the French Revolution of 1830 and the Paris Commune in 1871 witnessed the growth and transformation of European socialism. Excluded from political power, workers during the 1830s increasingly came to view their interests as separate from those of middle-class people, who not only enjoyed a more comfortable and relatively secure way of life but also were able to expand their role in the political systems of the Western European states. At the same time, as industrialization advanced, the composition of the working class slowly changed as wage-earning, dependent workers began to supplant independent artisans in the production process. Artisans remained the dominant political force among workers throughout this period but found themselves under increasing economic pressure not only due to competition from factories but also as a result of restructuring within the crafts in which mechanization lagged. This situation helped fuel intense social and political unrest, culminating most pointedly in the European Revolutions of 1848. The failure of the various political currents within the labor movement to achieve even their most basic political and economic demands then forced workers and their leaders to rethink their aims and approaches to political power. The conclusions they drew shaped the development of the socialist movement well into the twentieth century.

THE RISE OF CHARTISM IN BRITAIN

During the late 1820s, a new economic slump in Britain resulted in rising unemployment, falling wages, and declining living conditions for many rural and urban workers. One reaction was the "Swing Riots" of rural

workers in southern and eastern England who, in late 1830, attacked new threshing machines that threatened their livelihood. This movement, like its Luddite predecessor, was ruthlessly crushed. Another response, especially from the recently legalized and growing union movement, was the renewed call for parliamentary reforms giving male workers the right to vote and to stand for election. Events across the English Channel buoyed hopes for change. At the end of July 1830, in a three-day popular uprising, Parisians swept the reactionary Charles X (1756–1836) from the French throne and replaced him with a more liberal cousin, Louis Philippe (1773–1850), the Duke of Orléans. The revolution then triggered successful liberal rebellions in Belgium, which won its independence from the Netherlands in 1831, and Switzerland, where democratic forces pushed the Federal Diet to eliminate press restrictions, grant universal male suffrage, and limit clerical influence. Although liberal and nationalist revolts in Spain, Poland, and Italy failed, the revolutionary wave frightened the British upper classes and made them amenable to limited reforms.

Even before the July Revolution, the Tory-led British government had sought to ease domestic tensions with new legislation such as the repeal of the anti-union Combination Acts as well as laws preventing non-Anglicans, especially Catholics, from holding office or serving in parliament. Working-class leaders, such as the Owenite cabinetmaker William Lovett (1800–1877), now hoped for further gains. They were joined in this sentiment by middle-class supporters of the Whig Party, who hoped to increase their representation in a parliament largely dominated by wealthy landowners. Most Whigs were not interested in extending the suffrage to workers but aimed primarily to reform an electoral system rigged to favor the rural gentry at the expense of the rapidly growing industrial towns where the middle classes were strongest. Thus, middle-class leaders were willing to join forces with workers to press for change, but not of the kind that would directly enhance workers' political power. On the contrary, they used the mass mobilization of workers as a means of sending a dire message to the landed elite: only by broadening the franchise to the middle class will the state hold back the revolutionary mob.

In 1830, the Whigs won a slim majority in the House of Commons, but it took two more years of intense campaigning, including huge street rallies and violent outbreaks in districts under the control of reform opponents, as well as complex parliamentary machinations, to push the Reform Bill through the reactionary House of Lords. The final product increased the number of those qualified to vote from 220,000 to 670,000, about 20 percent of the adult male population. This arrangement greatly strengthened the parliamentary power of the rising commercial and industrial classes but left the workers out in the cold. Although the new Whig majority banned slavery in the empire in 1833 and instituted some

minimal restrictions on child labor, it also rejected a bill limiting the workday to ten hours, and in 1834 it passed the New Poor Law, which ended the traditional parish-based system of out-relief for the indigent. Those who could not find work now had the choice of either starving or entering the "workhouse," where family members were separated and adults performed hard labor in return for miserable bed and board. By undercutting local support for the impoverished, the law created a nationwide labor market to serve the burgeoning capitalist economy. And, as the later Chartist leader James Bronterre O'Brien (1865–1864) noted, it also "helped to open the people's eyes as to who are the real enemies of the working classes."¹

In the face of political exclusion and growing economic insecurity, many workers became increasingly conscious of themselves as a separate group with their own interests. They set about building their own institutions and finding their own solutions to pressing problems. Many became more open to socialist ideas. This process was already under way well before the campaign for reform. Between 1828 and 1832, the number of Owenite cooperative societies increased from four to 500. Spread throughout the country, they promoted cooperative retail stores "to circumvent the principles of capitalist trading" and founded "labor exchanges," where artisans attempted to recoup the full value of their labor by trading goods priced in units of labor time (i.e., the amount of labor time embodied in their production) rather than in currency.² Many of these enterprises, especially the labor exchanges, were undercapitalized or suffered from intractable practical problems that made them short lived, but they also illustrated the energy and optimism of the labor movement.

This vibrancy was especially true of the expanding trade unions. In the decade following their legalization, new craft unions emerged in sectors ranging from weaving to the building trades, and these attempted to create umbrella organizations to promote their joint interests. In early 1834, they formed the Grand National Consolidated Trades Union (GCTU), in which Owen played a leading role. Aiming not only to improve wages and working conditions, the GCTU also intended "to bring about a *different order of things*" in which the "undue control" of the "ignorant, idle, and useless parts of society" will be replaced by a system in which "the really useful and intelligent part of society . . . shall have direction of its affairs."³ These ambitious goals made clear that the union's long-term vision, however vague, went well beyond the immediate improvement of workers' lives and that change was to be achieved not as Owen had initially hoped, through the actions of society's elites, but rather from the bottom up.

Within a few months, the GCTU recruited over 500,000 workers to its banners, but it simultaneously had to grapple with ongoing strikes and a wave of new labor actions that quickly overwhelmed its resources. Em-

ployers responded to union organizing by forcing workers to sign documents pledging not to join, and the state began arresting and exiling unionists for "administering illegal oaths." Owen was also soon at odds with other GCTU leaders over how to move forward. He rejected harsh criticism of employers and the idea of class struggle. Although he dreamt of a great work stoppage that would bring the elites to their senses, in the summer of 1834 he preferred to shut down the GCTU's press rather than support a wave of new strikes. In August, with its membership hemorrhaging and its leadership in disarray, a GCTU delegate congress dissolved the organization.

Owenite cooperatives, labor exchanges, and trade unions won mass support because people saw them as a means of achieving a variety of aims. Denied the franchise, their press hindered by exorbitant stamp taxes, and their livelihood undercut by low wages, unemployment, and poor working conditions, many workers fumed at a system of wealth, power, and privilege that the radical democrat William Cobbet (1763–1835) called "The Thing."⁴ The dissolution of the GCTU was a blow to the construction of a nationwide union organization, but organizing continued, and Owenism remained a strong influence among workers, who continued to cast about for new means to achieve their ends.

In 1836, radical democratic activists led by William Lovett founded the London Working Men's Association for the political education of skilled workers. Two years later, Lovett penned the "Great Charter," which laid out six key demands for the democratization of the country: universal male suffrage, abolition of property qualifications for members of parliament, annual parliaments, equal electoral districts, the secret ballot, and salaries for parliamentarians. These "Chartist" demands were not in themselves "socialist," but many viewed their realization as an essential step toward establishing social justice. Within a year, supporters of the Charter built a nationwide mass movement that for a decade seemed poised to transform Britain's entire political order.

Chartism aimed to achieve reform through mass education and parliamentary petition. Although at times noisy segments of the movement advocated insurrection as a last resort, such sentiments garnered little support among workers who, despite frustrations, largely believed that major changes in Britain could be had without violent revolution. Chartist-supported mass demonstrations, strikes, and militaristic drilling, along with fiery rhetoric from top leaders, such as the charismatic orator Feargus O'Connor (1794–1855), sometimes created a very radical impression, but in the end the Chartists stepped back from the revolutionary brink.

Chartism, argues Dorothy Thompson, drew its strength from constituencies rooted in Britain's growing but still small and relatively homogeneous industrial communities, in which state and church authority was weak. These areas had their own traditions in regulating economic and

other affairs, were close knit, and had a generally unified sense of purpose. A wide range of skilled workers, factory operatives, and small shopkeepers backed the movement, which was also very much a family affair. Although patriarchal mores dominated the working-class milieu, Chartism encouraged the participation of women in its rituals and demonstrations, recognized their contributions to the family economy, and accepted their signatures. There were few female public speakers, but women organized Chartist schools, created important ancillary organizations to support the cause, and, with their husbands frequently under arrest, often faced managing their families on their own. Women's relative inclusion was a direct challenge to the norms of the Victorian middle classes and reflected the radical democratic outlook of the overall movement.

Chartism benefited from a wide array of local workers' organizations that rallied around the six points. These were linked together by an extensive press, the flagship of which was O'Connor's *Northern Star*. Working together, the press, traveling orators, and local organizations could mobilize mammoth demonstrations of hundreds of thousands of people, as they did in support of petitions presented to parliament in 1839 (1,280,000 signatures), 1842 (3,315,000 signatures), and 1848 (1,975,000 signatures). Parliament's summary dismissals of these petitions usually then precipitated intense infighting among Chartist leaders about how to respond. Tensions arose among factions led by such men as Lovett, a worker-intellectual interested mainly in organizing elite craftsmen and using an incremental, "moral force" approach to reform; O'Connor, a firebrand who spoke to the unskilled, opposed socialism, but also wielded the rhetoric of violent insurrection; and the journalist James Bronterre O'Brien, an Owenite socialist who, anticipating Marx, held that "the 'Working Classes' are the slave populations of the civilized countries." He feared that only a violent upheaval could bring their oppression to an end but hoped for peaceful change and was open to building alliances with middle-class supporters. O'Brien and O'Connor initially worked together but split over the latter issue and over a risky scheme of O'Connor's to resettle workers on the land.⁵

Such divisions weakened Chartist's ability to respond to the government's intransigent and often repressive policies. Following parliament's rejection of the petition in 1839, for example, a local uprising in Newport created a pretext for the police to arrest 450 Chartist leaders, including O'Connor and O'Brien. Decapitated, the movement went underground but revived in 1840 with the formation of the National Charter Association, which soon had 40,000 members. Following the failure of the petition of 1842, the Chartists were again paralyzed. When wage reductions precipitated massive strikes in Lancashire, Yorkshire, and the Midlands, they backed the strikers and paid a heavy price as the army occupied the region and arrested 1,500 people.

Support for Chartism ebbed but revived in the wake of the economic crisis of 1846–1847. O'Connor's election to parliament signaled the onset of renewed activity. A new petition campaign again included impressive mass demonstrations, and in the spring of 1848, as revolutions swept across Europe, Britain appeared headed for civil war. Amidst the talk of possible insurrection, however, the government remained unmoved. When the Chartists planned a giant demonstration to accompany the delivery of the new petition to parliament on 10 April, it mobilized such a show of armed force that the Chartist leaders, who were able to turn out only 30,000 followers at Kennington Common, backed down. Continued agitation over the summer resulted in widespread arrests. The movement then slipped into decline and disappeared by the mid-1850s.

Chartism arose primarily as a means for craft workers in tightly knit, smaller industrial communities to protect their institutions and way of life from the advance of laissez-faire capitalism. It also embodied workers' aspirations for greater political and social equality in a world increasingly dominated by the newly enfranchised bourgeoisie. The movement declined in part as a result of demoralization following repeated defeats, police repression, infighting among its leaders, and the national organization's bankruptcy in the wake of O'Connor's failed land resettlement scheme. But it also waned as its context changed. After 1850, Britain's industrial expansion created a more complex, less homogeneous urban world in which the traditional cultures of craft work gave way to newly emerging ones shaped by wage labor. At the same time, parliament's repeal of the Corn Laws (1845), which lowered the grain tariff and the cost of food, and the Ten Hours Bill (1847), which limited working hours in certain sectors, convinced many workers of the efficacy of gradual reform. Many came to see trade unions as a more viable alternative. Not forgotten, the aims of Chartism would be achieved within different community settings and via different institutional means.

THE REVOLUTION OF 1830 AND THE EMERGENCE OF FRENCH SOCIALISM

While Britain's constitutional monarchy proved flexible enough to avoid revolution in the early nineteenth century, the same cannot be said of its less democratic counterparts across the English Channel. Following the defeat of Napoleon in 1815, the victorious powers (Russia, Austria, Prussia, and Great Britain) reconstructed Europe's political order along conservative dynastic lines. In France, they restored the Bourbon dynasty to power, and the elevation of Louis XVIII also meant the revived influence of the church and the nobility. In Portugal, Spain, and central and southern Europe, the powers also restored monarchical governments, which did everything they could to exorcise the influence that French occupa-

tion had brought in the legal, administrative, and cultural spheres. The old elites everywhere reasserted their dominance by erecting political systems that excluded the mass of the people from participation. When dissent threatened, they could rely on domestic police and military forces. As a last resort, they could look to the armies of the Holy Alliance (Russia, Austria, and Prussia) to intervene on their behalf.

As John Merriman has observed, these efforts to restore the old order "resembled the Dutch boy gamely trying to dam the deluge by plugging up the holes in the dike with his fingers."⁶ Immediately following the Vienna Congress in 1815, liberal and nationalist forces challenged its effort of restoration in a series of revolts in Portugal, Spain, and Italy. These rebellions failed and put other reactionary governments on the alert. In 1819, for example, alarmed Austrian and Prussian officials in the German Confederation responded to widespread student support for a united Germany by issuing the Karlsbad Decrees, which muzzled the press, banned fraternities, and blacklisted teachers. But it was beyond the powers of even the most ruthless states to completely snuff out liberal and nationalist ideas. The Greek revolt in 1821 against Turkish domination won support across Europe putting pressure on Britain, France, and Russia to back the rebels and thus contradict their own conservative principles. Meanwhile, in Russia, though Tsar Nicholas I (1796–1855) easily crushed a liberal revolt in December 1825, the "Decembrist" uprising showed that forces advocating change were active even in Europe's most reactionary state.

The French monarchy was one of the first to crumble in the face of pressure from below. The restoration in France was less thorough than Louis XVIII (1755–1824) had desired because to secure his throne, he had to recognize key achievements of the revolution. These included the centralized state bureaucracy, Napoleon's Civil Code, the sale of nationalized church and aristocratic lands, and the titles, decorations, and pensions dispensed under Napoleon. Catholicism again became France's official religion, but in accordance with Napoleon's Concordat with the Papacy, it was subject to state controls, and the Civil Code granted toleration to Protestants and Jews. Louis's personal power was extensive but limited by terms spelled out in the Charter that he promulgated after Napoleon's fall. It guaranteed legal equality and freedom of the press and established an Assembly consisting of a Chamber of Deputies elected from a very narrow, property-based franchise and a Chamber of Peers appointed by the king (peerage was lifelong and hereditary). The king chose the government's ministers, who were responsible to him, not the Assembly, but taxes required the latter's consent.

These arrangements made few people happy. Archconservatives thought the system too democratic and sought to strengthen the authority of the Crown and Catholic Church. At the same time, middle-class merchants and industrialists chafed at their exclusion from a parliament

controlled by the landed elites. Tensions escalated after the reactionary Charles X assumed the throne in 1825. In the midst of an economic downturn, he not only rejected liberal demands to broaden the franchise but, in late July 1830, also abrogated the Charter and disenfranchised three-quarters of those already qualified to vote. The result was a popular uprising in Paris that forced Charles to abdicate on 2 August and brought his liberal cousin, Louis Philippe, to the throne. He promised to respect the Charter and extended the franchise to include the upper echelons of the bourgeoisie. This act doubled the electorate from about 100,000 to 200,000, or about 3 percent of the adult population.⁷

Louis Philippe's government denied the franchise to most middle-class people, but its pursuit of laissez-faire economic policies and its ethos, reflected in Prime Minister Guizot's admonition to the middle class to "enrich yourselves" and the king's habit of dressing like a bourgeois and surrounding himself with businessmen, made clear that it supported bourgeois interests. Indeed, under this "bourgeois monarch," France experienced substantial economic development, but many middle-class people remained alienated, and the workers, who had done most of the fighting in July, were particularly aggrieved. Following the "three glorious days," Parisian artisans had expected the government to ameliorate the impacts of the industrial depression and to recognize their right to control their trades. They called for higher wages, shorter working hours, public works to help the unemployed, and restrictions on mechanization. The government's response, however, disappointed them. It rejected their demands as attacks on "the liberty of industry" and forcibly suppressed demonstrations and strikes.⁸

Without access to the franchise and still subject to laws that punished union organizing and strikes with heavy fines and prison terms, French workers found themselves in a situation similar to that of their British counterparts following the passage of the Reform Bill. Over the course of the 1830s, however, many French artisans, who dominated productive industry, drew much more radical conclusions than the British. A substantial minority became convinced that neither the monarchy nor laissez-faire capitalism served their social or political interests and sought new means of organizing and asserting themselves in both economics and politics. Through their own experience and through their interaction with republican militants and newly emerging socialist thinkers, many artisans supported the idea of replacing destructive, competitive, private production with cooperative producers' associations in which workers collectively owned the means of production. In monarchical France, where private property was sacrosanct, radical workers' connections with republicanism and their idea of associative production put them on a collision course with the state and with the majority of property-owning Frenchmen.

French artisans did not have to start from scratch as they organized to promote their aims. As noted earlier, despite the 1791 ban on guilds, journeyman workers continued to operate traditional corporate institutions, such as the *compagnonages*, which were secret societies that provided shelter, placement, and training for men undertaking their Tour de France. Tolerated after the Restoration, their hierarchies, costumes, and rituals strongly shaped the identities of the tradesmen, and they also provided journeymen with an organizational basis to defend themselves, using partial or total work stoppages, when conflicts arose with the masters. In addition to the *compagnonages*, craftsmen established mutual aid or friendly societies that provided benefits in case of sickness, death, or disability. Contrary to law, these institutions also functioned as centers from which tradesmen could oversee wages and working conditions and take action when necessary. In Paris alone, there were hundreds of such societies during the 1830s.⁹

Workers' efforts to control their trades encountered not only the hostility of the state but also that of the masters, who resisted any interference with their use of private property. Initially, journeymen did not view their activities as means of supplanting the latter since the dream of every artisan was to have his own shop, but over time that began to change. As William H. Sewell has argued, the constant struggles between workers and capitalists over control of the production process, which actually led to major, ruthlessly suppressed uprisings in Lyon and Paris in 1831, 1832, and 1834, ultimately propelled a significant minority to conclude "that collective control over their trades was impossible without collective ownership of the means of production."¹⁰

The idea of moving toward an economy based on collective ownership was rooted in craftsmen's objection to the masters' appropriation of the products of their labor for their own profit. In the fall of 1830, Parisian printers began publishing *l'Artisan*, a journal expressing the conviction that, as the producers of all wealth, workers were the only productive class. Seeing mechanization under capitalism as a means for the masters to undercut their rivals by reducing labor costs, they proposed pooling resources and forming cooperative associations so that machinery could be used to ease their burdens and raise productivity from which all would benefit. This simple and straightforward analysis of the problem of exploitation and its solution formed the starting point for the trade socialism movement, which expanded rapidly over the next two decades.

Workers were not alone in exploring new means of addressing their problems. As we have seen, by the 1830s the ideas of Owen, Fourier, and Saint-Simon were widely circulated, but their analyses of exploitation and the means of ending it were rather different from those of the French workers. Many of their disciples, however, soon gravitated toward trade socialism. The physician Philippe Buchez (1796–1865), for example, was a former Saint-Simonian who had left the movement after its turn to relig-

ion. He agreed that, in industries in which skilled artisans (not factory hands, who needed outside control) predominated, workers did not require the aid of a capitalist master. To establish collectively owned shops, he suggested the creation of public credit banks that would provide start-up capital to new enterprises that would then be organized in cooperative trade associations.

This idea won the support of many Parisian workers, such as the tailors, box makers, chair makers, and glove makers, who in 1833 set up new associations or "national workshops" to employ striking workers and to put pressure on employers, and quickly spread among artisans in provincial cities such as Lyon, Marseilles, and Bordeaux. Although the government tried to suppress such efforts, they continued to spread. Republican groups, such as the Society of the Friends of the People and the Society of the Rights of Man, and the newspaper *La Tribune* (*The Tribune*) also began to advocate for cooperative production and public credit banks. Urging workers to join in the struggle against the monarchy, they asserted that "the essential duty of the republic will be to furnish proletarians with the means of forming . . . cooperative associations and exploiting industry themselves."¹¹

Perhaps the figure that best embodied this emerging socialist republican outlook was the lawyer and journalist Louis Blanc (1811–1882), whose book *The Organization of Work* (1840) argued that state aid could establish a system of "national workshops," or ateliers, run by the workers themselves. Blanc believed that capitalism exploited workers and prevented full employment. Influenced by Saint-Simon, he thought that the state could provide the legal framework and the capital, via a publicly owned credit bank, to create a rationally organized and more productive economy. His reading of Fourier, however, also convinced him that the state should not run the system. Instead, he envisioned urban workers managing industrial enterprises on their own with their cooperative associations supervising the distribution of a wide range of welfare benefits. In the countryside, where most people lived, he foresaw a system of modern collective farms and industrial centers displacing isolated peasant producers. Unlike Saint-Simon, Blanc placed democracy, in the form of universal manhood suffrage, at the heart of this system, which would guarantee employment, facilitate the organization of work, and ensure adequate wages and good working conditions. Rejecting class conflict and violent revolution as a means of achieving socialism, he optimistically hoped for change through reasoned discourse and broad-based social consensus.

Other socialist republicans, such as Auguste Blanqui (1805–1881), saw matters rather differently. Blanqui was the prototype of the nineteenth-century professional revolutionary. As a sixteen-year-old Parisian student, he joined the Carbonari, a clandestine movement seeking constitutional or republican governments in Italy, France, Spain, and Portugal.

Wounded in the Revolution of 1830, the young journalist then took part in the failed republican rising of 1832. Tried for his writings, when asked his profession, he replied "proletarian," an answer pointing to the social aspect of his revolutionary perspective. The term "proletarian" was originally used in the ancient world to describe the very poorest layers of society. Babeuf had revived the term and used it in the classical sense. Blanqui used it, however, in reference to the newly emerging class of wage laborers and factory workers. He identified with this emerging group, but having read Buonarrati's popular history of Babeuf's conspiracy, published in 1828, Blanqui also sympathized with his forebear's egalitarian aims and conspiratorial methods. A participant or leader in the insurrections of 1830, 1839, 1848, and 1871, he spent his entire adult life, thirty-three years of it in prison, struggling to implement them.

Blanqui differed from Babeuf in that he put great store in progress and science, and his writings, while unsystematic, engaged the assumptions of contemporary political economy, but the conclusions he drew were similar. Private property was illegitimate because a few individuals had "seized upon the common earth by ruse or by violence . . . and established by laws that it is to be their property forever." They used control over property to force others into various states of dependence as slaves, serfs, or wage-earning factory workers. The latter had no freedom "but that of choosing their masters" and were more expendable than slaves, who represented a larger investment. Wage laborers faced "incessant toil, barely providing today's pennies, constant uncertainty about tomorrow, and famine, if a caprice of anger or of fear" should result in their unemployment. Meanwhile, the privileged owners enjoyed "absolute autocracy" and ultimately "the right of life or death" over their workers.¹²

The struggle between workers and "idlers" was at its root an irreconcilable "duel to the death between profit and wage." The only way out, Blanqui was convinced, was the establishment of a communist society, one that he did not describe in detail but that would be based on "principles of association" worked out in the future. In order to achieve this aim, he insisted that it was necessary to clandestinely organize a small group of trusted revolutionaries who would seize power and establish a republic headed by a dictatorial committee of public safety that would then undertake gradually to create the new world. Blanqui expected workers to rally to the new regime en masse and thus secure it from counterrevolution. As events showed, that was his great miscalculation.

Blanqui became the master of insurrectionary planning. In 1835, he organized an underground Society of Families, so named from its secret structure based on small groups. As it plotted to seize power and amassed arms, the police infiltrated its ranks and arrested Blanqui and other leaders. After a year in jail, they were amnestied and immediately set up a new conspiratorial group, the Society of Seasons, which used the seasonal calendar to organize its hierarchy. Consisting mostly of workers

but also some students, it also hoped to win over soldiers to its cause. On 12 May 1839, Blanqui showed that his organization was well disciplined and capable of action. Taking the authorities by surprise, he and about 600 men seized Paris's City Hall and proclaimed a republic. To their chagrin, however, the workers did not rally to the cause. Within a short time, government forces regrouped and crushed the rebels. Tracked down a few months later, Blanqui received a death sentence that was commuted to life in prison. The conditions of his incarceration were so brutal, however, that his health collapsed, and, thought to be on the verge of death, he was released in 1847. He recovered just in time to participate in the Revolution of 1848.

Blanqui's actions inspired many other radicals yet showed them the foolhardiness of insurrectionary politics divorced from mass support. Many other socialist leaders, including Marx, Engels, and Lenin, sharply criticized his focus on the technique of seizing power without having built closer connections with the people.

The workers' muted response to Blanqui's insurrection did not mean that revolutionary sentiment was lacking; there was much ferment among artisanal trade socialists, republican activists, and socialist intellectuals following the July Revolution. Another sign of mass support for radical change was the popularity of the "communist" teachings of Etienne Cabet (1788–1856), a lawyer who, after participating in the July Revolution and serving as a government official and a member of the Chamber of Deputies, became a sharp critic of the lack of democracy. Exiled to England between 1834 and 1839, he was strongly influenced by Owenism, radical trade unionism, and his reading of Thomas Moore's *Utopia* (1516). After returning to France, he published a popular novel, *Voyage en Icarie* (1840), depicting a communist society of absolute equality in which a democratically controlled state managed the production and distribution of goods. Cabet's ideas were not original, and his attempts to found communist communities in France and, after 1848, in the United States failed like so many other, similar efforts. His importance, however, stemmed from his recruitment of thousands of followers among distressed craft workers in many regions, mainly through skillful use of newspapers such as *Le Populaire*, founded in 1841. Cabet's ability to speak to workers won him widespread respect even among critics. As Amédée Dunois put it, "The Cabet who counts for history is . . . the founder and leader of one of the first proletarian groupings, of a veritable workers' party."¹³

Many skilled workers turned to the ideas of men like Cabet because of perceived threats to their way of life. Like their twenty-first century counterparts, early nineteenth-century craftsmen viewed work as more than simply a way to earn money. They certainly sought employment to achieve economic security, but they also reveled in their autonomy as independent producers, in the creativity of the labor process, and in their

ability to strive for mastery in turning out high-quality goods. It was the spread of large-scale manufactories in which wage-earning artisans carried out increasingly repetitive, simplified tasks in a more complex division of labor (later amplified through the introduction of machinery) that threatened their future and steered many into radical politics. As we have seen, some viewed collective property as a means of preserving their control over the trades. But others rejected this solution and sought, instead, alternatives that would preserve small property. Among the most important of their spokesmen was the autodidact and printer Pierre Proudhon (1809–1865).

Proudhon was at heart a social conservative with deeply held antifeminist, anti-Semitic, anticommunist, and antihomosexual views who wished to preserve the patriarchal social order of preindustrial France. His reputation as a "socialist," however, grew out of the analysis in his most important book, *What Is Property?*, published in 1840. His answer, "It is theft!" made him famous but was also less sweeping than it sounded. Proudhon did not mean all property, only that permitting someone to live without working. Opposed to the inequality that accompanied the rise of large-scale industry, he wished to abolish the established system of credit and exchange and create one that supported small communities of cooperative, family-run enterprises supporting one another through mutual aid (e.g., credit cooperatives and insurance societies). Proudhon regarded the state as an oppressive institution intricately bound up with the exploitive economic system. Rejecting violent revolution and, more inconsistently, participation in parliamentary politics, he argued for replacing the centralized state with a decentralized federal system. This opposition to the state made Proudhon one of the founders of what some call "libertarian socialism" or anarchism. Overlapping with and rivaling more state-centered socialist movements, it became a strong force in southern European politics until late in the century.

Thus, Paris in the 1840s was a center of social, political, and ideological ferment. Growing worker unrest, intensifying criticism of the monarchy, and wide-ranging debates about the society of the future made the city a magnet for intellectual dissidents from across the Continent. Among the most important of the foreigners to arrive in those years were Karl Marx (1818–1883) and Friedrich Engels (1820–1895), who, like many of their countrymen, were escaping the repressive absolutism of Prussia and its allies. Their impact on the development of socialism was of central importance, and it is to their story that we now turn.

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MARX, ENGELS, AND THE COMMUNIST MANIFESTO

Few intellectual and political partnerships have been as powerful and long lasting as that of Marx and Engels; their ideas not only contributed

they did not think that a proletarian revolution would occur everywhere at once. They expected workers' struggles to be fought out on the terrain of the national state, and they believed that a workers' revolution was most imminent in countries like Great Britain, where industrial development was most advanced and the labor movement best organized. They also sensed a bourgeois revolution approaching in Germany and believed it would act as a prelude to an immediately following proletarian revolution. They were right that revolution was immanent, but it began in France.

THE REVOLUTION OF 1848

begin?

On 25 February 1848, after almost eighteen years in power, King Louis Philippe ignominiously abandoned the throne. Like his predecessor Charles X, he fled the country after "three glorious days" of revolution in which students, middle-class people, and workers took to the barricades demanding reforms. Frustration had been widespread during the "hungry-forties," as the government's laissez-faire policies did little to alleviate depressed conditions. Agricultural crisis, skyrocketing food and fuel costs, and urban unemployment had caused widespread and frequent violence. In the wake of Louis Philippe's flight, the crowd proclaimed France to be a republic, and the Chamber of Deputies appointed a provisional government pending the election of a Constituent Assembly to write a new constitution. Under popular pressure, the new government, dominated by the propertied elite, agreed to add Louis Blanc to its ranks. It also immediately introduced universal manhood suffrage, banned slavery in the colonies, limited the workday to ten hours, and lifted restrictions on unions, political clubs, and other forms of association.

Social tensions still loomed large. With a small ostentatious Parisian elite living in close proximity to a large and increasingly destitute working class, the government found itself confronted with workers' demands for a "social republic." Many members opposed state intervention in the economy but made concessions to calm the streets. When Blanc called for the implementation of his plan for national workshops for the unemployed and the creation of a labor ministry, the government halfheartedly acquiesced. It placed Blanc at the head of a toothless "Luxembourg Commission" to study labor conditions and created national workshops, but these had little in common with his ideas and amounted to a program of out-relief for the unemployed. When enrollment rocketed from 21,000 to 94,000 in April, new taxes to cover the costs angered middle-class people and the peasantry, which resented and feared workers' demands. The April elections to the Constituent Assembly reflected this fear. Only 100 radical republicans and socialists won seats in the 900-member body in

which conservative forces, including many monarchists, dominated. Counterrevolution was on the march.

Meanwhile, news of the February events precipitated revolutions across much of Europe. Uprisings, usually initiated by the middle classes and then strongly backed by the workers, engulfed Vienna, Milan, Prague, Berlin, and the major cities of all the German states. To save themselves, monarchs granted liberal constitutions abolishing the remnants of feudalism and introducing limited suffrage, freedom of the press, and trial by jury. The creation of parliamentary institutions in Prussia, Austria, and many other states, as well as the election of the Frankfurt parliament to write a constitution for the whole of Germany, including Austria, reflected the high tide of democratic and nationalist sentiments. These gains largely satisfied middle-class and student elements among the revolutionaries, but they did not satisfy the artisans, who were the majority of those taking part in bloody fighting in cities such as Berlin and Vienna. As in Paris, the artisans sought economic reforms to improve their condition and protect them from nascent industrial competition. They established clubs and workers' associations to promote their interests, and one organization, the Brotherhood of Workers, established a presence throughout the German lands. Led by Stefan Born (1824–1898), it had 15,000 members who called for universal manhood suffrage, the right to unionize, the establishment of producer and consumer cooperatives, and the introduction of pensions and sickness insurance.

Such demands, when combined with peasant protests against enclosure and challenges to the authority of rural elites, petrified the propertied middle classes. In the course of 1848 and 1849, as monarchs everywhere began rolling back revolutionary reforms, they faced the choice of either allying themselves with radical democratic and socialist workers or accepting compromise arrangements with the old landowning and government elites. Most chose the latter.

The counterrevolution won its first great victory in France. On 21 June, the Assembly closed the national workshops and urged the Parisian unemployed to either move to the provinces or join the army. Workers—mostly artisans from the building, metalworking, clothing, and furniture trades but also some industrial employees—responded by throwing up barricades in the central and eastern districts, but over 100,000 army, National Guard, and largely middle-class Mobile Guard troops moved to crush them. During four days of bloody fighting, General Cavaignac's forces killed or executed over 1,500 insurgents and arrested 12,000. Over 4,000 were later deported to distant colonies.

It would be inaccurate to claim that this conflict was simply a struggle of the workers against the propertied elite. There were, for example, various types of workers among Cavaignac's troops, just as some middle-class people allied themselves with the workers. Nevertheless, the gener-

al configuration of opposing forces was clear and the political trend for workers ominous. The government limited freedom of the press and assembly and closed down political clubs. General Cavaignac (1802–1857) became head of state until the November presidential election, when Napoleon's nephew, Louis Napoleon Bonaparte (1808–1873), became the candidate of those longing for "order" and won a sweeping electoral victory. When parliamentary elections in 1850 revealed growing support for radical democratic and socialist candidates, the Assembly narrowed the franchise to exclude many workers. Frustrated by constitutional limitations to his authority, Louis Napoleon launched a coup in December 1851, seized full control, and ruthlessly crushed a republican insurrection. Stocks soared after more than 90 percent of the voters approved of the coup in a plebiscite. After promulgating a new constitution giving him sweeping powers, Louis Napoleon proclaimed himself Napoleon III, Emperor of the French, on 2 December 1852. The revolution in France had come full circle.

The June Days heartened reactionary forces, which soon reasserted themselves across Europe. By December 1848, for example, Prussian King Frederick William IV (1795–1861) had dismissed his liberal cabinet, restored military control over Berlin, dissolved the new Prussian parliament, and crushed rebellions in the Rhineland and Silesia. His forces also supported other German princes who suppressed radical-democratic and socialist clubs and publications and rounded up dissidents. In the spring of 1849, the Prussians defeated a number of risings in their western and southwestern provinces, and the king subsequently dismissed a desperate offer from the hapless Frankfurt parliament to make him emperor of a united Germany. In Austria and Italy, the story was similar. Austria's military defeated Piedmont and retook Milan, smashed opposition in Prague, reasserted control over Vienna, and, with the help of the Russian army, crushed nationalist forces in Hungary. The King of Naples reconquered Sicily in May, and in July, ironically, French forces dispatched by the National Assembly helped the pope destroy the newly proclaimed Roman Republic.

The victory of the reaction was a massive defeat for radical democratic and socialist forces everywhere. Independent workers' political organizations were suppressed; many activists grew disillusioned and turned away from politics, and others fell to fighting among themselves. At least a decade would pass before the labor movement began to recover. It should be noted, however, that the conservative triumph did not return Europe to the status quo ante. Nationalism in Italy, Hungary, and Germany soon reemerged as a powerful force. And, while monarchs and traditional elites had salvaged much of their power, feudalism had been abolished, and in most states constitutions now limited royal power to some extent and gave parliamentary representation to the liberal bourgeoisie.

The latter then promoted economic policies that cleared the way for the advance of capitalism.

Meanwhile, thousands of nationalist, democratic, and socialist revolutionaries sought asylum outside of their homelands. Many, such as Marx and Engels, landed in London. With the outbreak of revolution, they had returned to Germany, where, among other things, Marx had edited a radical newspaper in Cologne and Engels had distinguished himself as an officer in the rebel army in Baden. With the revolution's defeat, both men escaped to London, where they joined a large exile community. Expecting a new revolutionary outbreak any day, they believed that their stay would be brief. Neither imagined that they would remain there for the rest of their lives.

FROM REPRESSION TO RENEWAL: FOUNDING THE INTERNATIONAL WORKING MEN'S ASSOCIATION

Marx and Engels arrived in London at the very moment when the radical British labor movement, especially its Chartist current, was collapsing and the country was about to enter into a long period of economic prosperity. For the next quarter of a century, British capitalism boomed, employment and living standards rose, and most skilled workers saw their collective interests best served by entering moderate, craft-oriented trade unions willing to cooperate with capital. New legislation in the 1860s and 1880s also extended the franchise to most male workers, who tended to look for representation to the Liberal Party until late in the century. Socialism as a political movement remained on the margins.

On the Continent, too, the economy expanded. Between 1850 and 1873, France and Austria-Hungary registered substantial industrial growth, but Germany, now entering its industrial revolution, set the pace with 4.8 percent yearly. The use of steam engines rose by 1,800 percent, production of coal quadrupled, and raw iron and steel output rose fourteenfold and fifty-four-fold, respectively. Alfred Krupp, one of Germany's arms manufacturers, employed sixty workers in 1836 and 16,000 in 1873. Workers' organizations were largely suppressed, but in the 1860s the situation began to improve. Although factory labor still remained the exception rather than the rule, the expansion of large-scale mining, metal, and chemical industries and the onset of mass production in the consumer goods sector fueled changes in the structure of the working class. Over time, these changes would lead socialists to rethink their goals as government repression eased and the movement reemerged as a force in European politics.

With no revolution in the offing and the Communist League effectively suppressed, Marx and Engels settled into British exile. Marx's growing family was impoverished. He worked as a journalist but had to rely on

Engels, who had assumed a post in the office of his family's firm in Manchester, for support. Engels's subsidies allowed Marx to return to his studies of capitalism, which he continued to the end of his life. After many delays due largely to chronic illness, financial problems, political distractions, and the sheer scope of the project, the final result of this work was the publication of *Capital*, the first volume of which appeared in 1867, with volumes 2 and 3, edited by Engels, appearing posthumously in 1885 and 1894, respectively.

Capital is an imposing work rich in irony and insight. Marx's purpose was to study what he called the "natural laws of capitalist production," and his laboratory was Britain, where the system was most developed. By including an investigation of the system's origins, he aimed to "lay bare the economic law of motion of modern society" in order to understand capitalism's emergence elsewhere and possibly "shorten or lessen the birth pangs." At the heart of the analysis was Marx's assertion that the origin of capitalist profit is to be found not in the process of exchange, where people trade equivalents, but in production. In bare outline, he argued that the production of commodities requires constant and variable capital. Constant capital consists of the necessary raw materials, machinery, and infrastructure; its value during production does not change. Variable capital, however, consisted of workers' labor power, the value of which could change. Workers sell their labor power to capitalists who employ them for a given amount of time to produce commodities for sale on the market. At a minimum, the value of a worker's labor power should be equivalent to what he and his family need to subsist. If this was \$100 per day, a worker might produce its equivalent in four hours on the job. If, however, the employee worked for another four hours, then he would produce an additional \$100. Marx calls this excess, which accrues to the capitalist, surplus value. From it owners derive capital for new investment or pure profit for consumption. Capitalists try to increase the surplus by extending the workday or by intensifying output. Workers try to gain a greater share of the surplus via higher wages. The constant struggle over the share of the surplus was at the core of capitalism's tendency to slip into crises of overproduction or, seen from another vantage point, underconsumption.

Marx aimed to illustrate how the extraction of surplus value (i.e., the exploitation of the worker) made capital accumulation possible. It was not a question of an individual capitalist's morality. Without exploitation, the system could not function. Yet Marx's powerful prose reveals that, despite his pretensions of scientific detachment, he found the system morally appalling. The means it used for raising productivity "distort the worker into a fragment of a man, they degrade him to the level of an appendage to a machine, they destroy the actual content of his labor by turning it into a torment; they alienate from him the intellectual potentialities of the labor process in the same proportion as science is incorporated

in it as an independent power . . . they transform his lifetime into working time, and drag his wife and child beneath the wheels of the juggernaut of capital." As he had argued in the *Manifesto*, Marx insisted that "the accumulation of wealth at one pole is, therefore, at the same time the accumulation of misery . . . at the opposite pole."²⁶

Despite this grim picture, Marx and Engels remained optimistic. Back in the early 1840s, they had criticized philosophers content with merely understanding the world. "The point," Marx had written, "was to change it."²⁷ They never wavered from that conviction, and when, after a decade of reaction, new possibilities for working-class politics emerged, they were ready. During the early 1860s, more liberal government policies in France and Germany (see chapter 3) led to a revival of workers' political activity. In 1862, worker delegations from a number of countries visited the London International Exposition, where they exchanged ideas and established longer-lasting contacts. In April 1864, during a meeting called in solidarity with the Polish struggle for independence against tsarism, English and French workers decided to create the International Working Men's Association. When the founders convened in St. Martin's Hall in London that September, Marx sat in the audience. By the evening's end, he was an elected member of the Association's General Council and, charged with drafting its statutes, soon became one of its most important leaders.

With the exception of Marx, all thirty-four members of the General Council were manual laborers, but otherwise they were a heterogeneous lot. English trade unionists constituted the largest group and were concerned mainly with strengthening collective bargaining, not revolution. The rest included English Owenite and Chartist remnants, French Proudhonists and Blanquists, and a mix of republicans and supporters of Italian and Polish independence. Marx understood that keeping this group united would require a deft hand. In his "Inaugural Address" outlining the International's program, he first sketched a history of the labor movement between 1848 and 1864 in which, despite the "unrivaled" development of industry, "the misery of the working masses has not diminished."²⁸ Toning down the language of revolution pervading the *Manifesto*, he then lauded workers' efforts to found producers' and consumers' cooperatives and praised the passage of the Ten Hours Bill, but he also made sure to conclude that piecemeal reforms alone could "never arrest the growth in geometrical progression of monopoly, to free the masses, nor even to perceptively lighten the burden of their miseries."

Instead, Marx asserted, cooperative labor "developed to national dimensions" and "fostered [by] national means" was required. Such a goal made the conquest of political power "the great duty of the working classes." Solidarity, the "bond of brotherhood" among them, was essential for success, and on that note Marx closed with the call, "Proletarians of all countries, Unite!"²⁹

Over the course of the next eight years, the International's efforts to organize workers across Europe met with modest results. Dozens of unions and labor organizations in many countries, some with thousands of members, "affiliated," but the number of dues-paying individuals was probably not more than a few hundred. The Association made strenuous efforts to support striking workers, such as the London tailors in 1866 and the Parisian bronze workers the following year, by raising funds and campaigning against strikebreakers. These activities did not bring much real power but did enhance the organization's image as a defender of workers' interests and, of course, earned it the ire of the propertied classes. As we will see in the next chapter, factional infighting, in which Marx was often at the center, also weakened the organization. By 1872, just one year after being blamed, inaccurately, for the outbreak of revolution in Paris, the Association effectively dissolved.

Marx was a tough political infighter, but, as the "Inaugural Address" makes clear, he understood the need for tactical flexibility to weld together a diverse constituency. Although he looked ahead to a time when "the revival of the movement allows the old boldness of language," the address marked a shift in his thinking away from the conspiratorial approach of the Communist League and toward the idea of building a large, more open mass movement that could vie for political power on a parliamentary stage.³⁰ Such parties were just taking form as many European states, such as France and soon-to-be-united Germany and Italy, moved toward electoral systems allowing broader participation in politics. Marx and Engels understood the advantages and limitations of such systems from experience in Britain, and they supported making use of them as they emerged on the Continent. In the late 1860s, many workers still saw fighting on the barricades as an effective means of achieving revolution. That would change within a few decades.

