

## The Revisionists

This could be misnamed somewhat. These were socialists that came after Marx. However, they were not necessarily Marxist in their assumptions or approaches. They were undoubtedly influenced by Marx, but they rejected many of his notions while trying to put a more humane system into place. Each has a name, as follows:

*Fabian Socialists:* The who's who of late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in England were involved in a loose net of socialist thinkers later called the Fabians. The Fabians were named after a Roman General that resisted Hannibal in every way possible, except in physical battle. Revolution was not a part of the Fabian creed. They generally aligned themselves with the Labor party in Great Britain and were certainly influential in England's flirtation with government ownership of the major means of production.

While they agreed on a wide variety of issues, their approaches were often slightly different. All were concerned with income inequality. However, some were more democratic than others and they had differing views concerning Britain's place in the world.

Probably the best known of the Fabians was George Bernard Shaw. You know, he was the one that said, "Do not do unto others as you may have them do unto you, their tastes may not be the same."

Shaw's big concern was the inequality of wealth. He did not believe this inequality came from unearned income called surplus value, as Marx contended. Rather, it came from ownership of capital. It was the private property aspect of capitalism, especially as it related to big business, that caused the sin of inequality.

Shaw was an elitist. As such, he did not trust democratically elected parliament to bring about social reform. He was in favor of a governmental system run by "experts" in various fields. Kind of the opposite of the populist movement in the U.S., and recently, in the State of Minnesota.

Shaw argued that there was only one just distribution of income, total equality. This would be accomplished through disengaging the relationship between production and income distribution. This would mean that incentives other than monetary would be required to get people to produce, more specifically, social incentives would need to be instituted as incentive systems.

Shaw felt that England, being the advanced country it was, had a leadership role to play in the world. This leadership role would be accomplished through imperialist practices, including holding on, at almost all costs, to the British empire. As I said, Shaw was an elitist in the strict sense of the term.

Shaw, the Fabian Society's best know spokesperson, stood somewhat alone on the democracy issue. Most Fabians had great faith in an enlightened electorate's ability to vote for people and

for issues that would benefit all of society.

Chief among these were two very hard working and very influential individuals, Sidney and Beatrice Webb. Sidney (1859-1947) graduated from college at sixteen years of age. He became an attorney, served in parliament, served in Labor party cabinets, and participated with his wife in writing many articles and forty plus books. They helped to found the London School of Economics, now known as the University of London.

Beatrice (1858-1943) was born to a wealthy finance and railroad family. Her wealth enabled her to have the luxury of time to think, write and be activists.

Obviously, they believed in a democratic society. So much so that they encouraged the formation of unions and consumer cooperatives. They did not encourage producer cooperatives since any attempt to corner a market on the producer's part would lead to monopoly power and unequal income distribution.

Their hope was that the unions and consumer cooperatives would eventually replace capitalism with a system based on cooperation and equality. Their cooperatives would be managed by professionals. However, these professionals would answer, democratically, to the workers. They felt that workers were intelligent and motivated enough to run the factories and other economic entities of the day. In fact, they felt that there should be two parliaments, one for domestic political and foreign affairs, the other to guide the economy.

Other members of the Fabians were people such as H. G. Wells, Bertrand Russell, and Sydney Olivier. As mentioned, their greatest influence was on the Labor party. The Fabian philosophy led to the Labor Party's embracing of a socialist system in 1918.

*German Revisionists:* The leading spokesperson for the German Revisionists was Eduard Bernstein (1850-1932). Up until World War I, the German Social Democratic Party was undoubtedly Marxist in its orientation. German workers were far more impoverished than were their counterparts in England. The conditions of the poor were also worse than England's. There was a definite radical bias in the German politics of the time.

However, the Social Democrats eventually formed the basis for revisionism. Bernstein was thrown out of Germany in 1881 because of his socialist views. He went to Switzerland, where he was thrown out in 1888. He then went to London where he associated with Engels until Engel's death in 1895. He also associated with many of the prominent Fabians. Eventually, Bernstein came to reject Marx and Engel's theories of scientific socialism.

Socialism was not inevitable according to Bernstein. The death of the middle class was incorrectly predicted by Marxists. The notion of class warfare was incorrect. Instead, there were many competing interests that would work out their compromises in the political arena. Government was not in the hands of a dominant class, but with universal suffrage, was in the

hands of the people. Unions and other worker organizations worked against domination by the owners. Property was not inevitably going to be centralized in fewer and fewer hands. Instead, with public ownership of corporations growing, ownership would be diffused over the entire population.

He felt that economic interests were becoming less important as society advanced and living standards improved. These would be replaced by ethical considerations promoted by interest groups. Therefore, socialism would have to be a system designed on the basis of ethical considerations through the democratic process. If we were to have socialism, it would come out of the political process, not from revolution.

Neither would the workers in the world their interests as being homogeneous. Instead, they would identify with their own nations and would be loyal to their flags over the flags of other countries. Like George Bernard Shaw, Bernstein saw many cases where imperialism was not the tool of the capitalist class to gain control over foreign markets and resource supplies. It was, in many cases, justified from a nationalist point of view. After all, Germany was one of the countries in Europe responsible for civilizing the rest of the world.

At the end, Bernstein became concerned about the socialism of private property. He called instead for public control of private institutions grown big enough to exert economic power. This is where democracy works against the interests of the very rich. Bernstein died just weeks before Hitler took power in Germany.

*What Came Out of European Revisionism:* Up until World War I, living conditions improved throughout much of Europe. The drive for social ownership and control of the major means of production diminished during this period. The Labor party in England and the Social Democrat party in Germany gained influence. When they did, the pressure to take a more conservative stance was increased. The need to be re-elected became as important, if not more important, than the need for reform. The Marxists argued that the revisionists had lost their way and that electoral influences could not overcome the course of capitalist history.

The Labor party and the Social Democratic parties are very strong today. However, it is interesting to note that both parties have, at least temporarily, repudiated socialism as a political goal. Some would argue that these parties are not that much different from the more conservative parties in England and in Germany.

*One Other Revisionist, Mao Tse-tung:* There were several revisions Mao sought to make of Marxist doctrine, although there can be no question that Mao was a Marxist.

Marx felt that the revolution would come from the urban areas of industrialized nations. It were they that would be in close communication with one another so that the worker's alienation from society and from the true economic sphere could be exposed. There was a communist uprising in the urban areas of China. But these were quickly, and harshly, ended by the Chinese

government.

Mao took the revolution to rural areas where he engaged his army of peasants. His guerilla war tactics were successful. He became convinced that agriculture based economies, based on peasant labor, would be the first to fall from capitalism's grasp. It would then be these countries that would serve as the base for the export of revolution to the more advanced and industrialized countries.

Another conclusion reached by Mao dealt with the necessity of violence in a communist revolution. Certainly in their later lives, Marx and Engels began to explore the possibility for evolutionary socialism through the political process. Mao clearly rejected this idea. He felt that change could only come about through the gun, that violence against the dominant class was necessary. He felt that, once the revolution in the Soviet Union ended, they abrogated their revolutionary responsibility to the rest of the world by not encouraging violent revolution in other countries.

In fact, much of Mao's philosophy stemmed from what he regarded as the revisionist policies of the Soviet Union. In this regard, a third area of concern by Mao centered on what happened after the revolution. He regarded the Soviet Union as containing another privileged class within the bureaucracy. These people were paid higher wages, were accorded greater social status, and left to their children many of these privileges of what would otherwise be considered as a capitalist bourgeoisie.

Mao argued that the revolution was never over. A constant war against privilege had to be waged to stamp out the capitalist within us. His so-called Cultural Revolution within China was an outgrowth of these thoughts. This revolution found the bureaucrats and the intellectuals within China attacked by the Proletarian class. They were often killed. But when not, they were put to work on the farms primarily, and sometimes in the factory, doing the work of the laborer. All vestiges of privilege were to be eliminated through this often very violent period in China's history.

Finally, Marx and Engel felt that the first stage of the new system would still have to provide monetary incentives in order for production to take place and standards of living to be maintained. Only after all vestiges of capitalism were eliminated could a truly cooperative system be put into place.

Mao argued for self-sacrifice and human perfection from the beginning. To this end, material incentives were to be eliminated immediately after the revolution. The sooner cooperative systems could replace competitive systems, the sooner we would evolve to a place where material needs could be met without material incentives. Many of these issues are still being debated among people still interested in the replacement of capitalism with a system based on cooperation and equality.