

5 Politics and Social Reform



1 'THE PROMISED LAND' OF MARXISM
Propaganda cartoon, end of 19th century
On a windswept shore, proletarians of all countries prepare to embark on the ships of their demands, guided by Karl Marx as Moses, with the Tablet of his Law under his arm.



2 SOCIAL DEMOCRACY
Standard-bearer of Socialist ideology and the working-class, the German Social-Democrat Party was established in Gotha in 1875 at the instigation of August Bebel (centre). With its own schools and newspapers and its own discipline, it was a model for its sister parties, with which in 1889 it formed the Second International.

Political systems

By the end of the 19th century, partly as a result of nationalism, most Europeans were no longer ruled by absolutist sovereigns but by constitutional monarchs or republican presidents. In France, under the Third Republic, the ministerial Cabinet was answerable to the Senate and to the Chamber of Deputies, elected for four years by universal male suffrage. The members of the Chamber and the Senate elected a President for a term of seven years. In the Kingdom of Italy, only Piedmont had a parliamentary tradition and few Italians had the right to vote. Great Britain was a constitutional monarchy with a parliamentary system. In the German Empire, the Chancellor and his ministers were appointed and dismissed by the Kaiser or Emperor: they depended on him and not on the parliamentary institutions.

The scene was dominated by right-wing (Conservative) or centre (right or left-wing Liberal) political parties: but at the end of the century new parties appeared. In Germany it was a Catholic party, which later became the dominant partner in coalition with the Conservatives. In the United Kingdom the Irish Question was the politicians' stumbling-block: a movement for Irish independence emerged, calling for 'Home Rule' (Irish autonomy), the repeal of the Act of Union and the establishment of an Irish parliament.

Karl Marx, as a refugee in London, analyzed the economic machinery of British capitalism and based his analysis on a would-be scientific form of socialism that had considerable influence. With Friedrich Engels he drew up *The Manifesto of the Communist Party* in 1848, and in 1867 he published *Das Kapital*. The International Working Men's Association (the 'First International', 1864–72) was partly based on Marx's work.

Socialist parties were also emerging in Europe. In Germany the working men's party founded in 1869 by August Bebel led in 1875 to the Social-Democrat Party. From the 1880s Social-Democrat parties based on the German model were set up in Belgium, Austria, Hungary, Poland, the Netherlands and Russia. In Great Britain, in 1893, the Independent Labour Party was formed and in 1900 it linked with the trade unions to create the Labour Party. Social Democrats also became important in Scandinavia, where they worked closely with the trade unions. In Italy, despite the resistance they faced, the Socialists won more seats in parliament. In France

Socialism tried to recover from the crushing of the Paris Commune in 1871, which put an end to its utopian strain. Even so, French Socialism remained divided into a number of tendencies, which Jean Jaurès tried to bring together. He was a humanistic Socialist in the tradition of the 1789 Revolution and a champion of international peace.

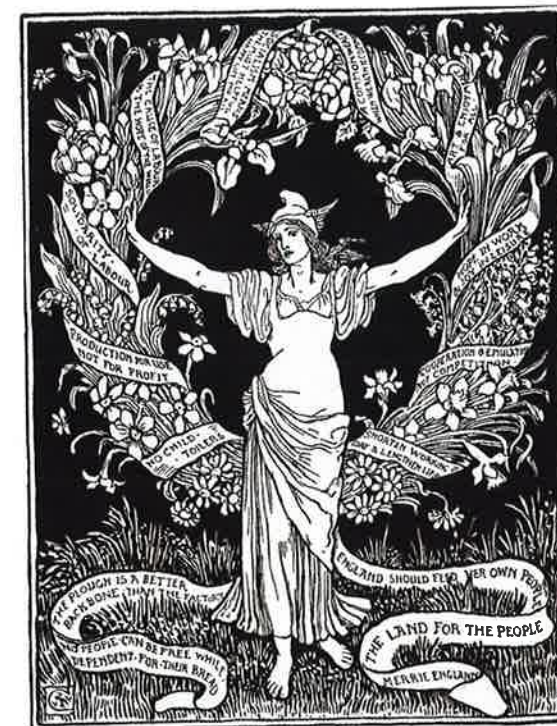
Saving world peace was also the aim of the last congresses held by the Second International, founded in Paris in 1889 by the non-revolutionary Socialist parties, among which the German and Russian Social-Democrats were the most influential. At such gatherings all the problems of industrial society were discussed. 1 May was made International Labour Day. The workers' movement also increased their influence by European cooperation: in 1900 they established the International Labour Office in Brussels.

Despite strong opposition by employers, the trade unions were gradually recognized as the genuine representatives of the workforce. They acquired legal status between 1870 and 1900 (but not until 1906 in Russia). The first groups to organize were skilled workers. Trade union action was strengthened by large-scale strikes like that of the London dockers and the Ruhr miners, both in 1889. In Britain and Germany the unions mounted political pressure for building a Socialist society. In some countries, like Italy and Germany, Catholic workers sought to dissociate themselves from the Socialists and founded non-political unions. But everywhere, in Britain, France, Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden, the trade unions and the labour parties had acquired political weight and governments had to meet their calls for better working conditions.

Social reform

In the last years of the 19th century, attempts were made to eliminate the ill-effects of industrialization and in particular the exploitation of children in factories and workshops. All the countries of Europe, except Russia and in the Balkans, passed laws to deal with the length of the working day, working conditions and safety rules to protect employees. But child labour did not completely stop. Many workers still had to put up with unhealthy and often dangerous conditions, and in many cases the working day was more than ten hours long. Governments and reformers were equally concerned with the problems of housing and public health.

So it was that in the 1860s Baron Haussmann put into practice an ambitious plan of reform for the city of Paris, including among other things a system of sewers and water supply: whole dis-



3 THE SPRINGTIME OF SOCIALISM
In July 1889 two international workers' congresses decided to organize an annual demonstration on 1 May, in memory of 1 May 1886, when the American government had agreed to reduce the working day to eight hours.



4 'THE MAKER OF THE NEW PARIS'
Painting by Yvon Adolphe. Carnavalet Museum, Paris
In 1859 Napoleon III hands to Baron Haussmann the decree annexing the peripheral communes of Auteuil, Grenelle, Vaugirard, Passy, Bercy, Charonne, Belleville, Batignolles, Chaillot, etc., needed to accommodate the factories and working population driven out by the demolition of Old Paris. This forced removal was much disliked by those who suffered it.