

The Ultimate Socialism Masterpost

**The internet sleuth's beginner guide to socialism, communism, Marxism,
Leninism and Actually Existing Socialism**

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General Essays on Socialism and Anti-Socialist Myths

A Beginner's Guide to the Left

Introduction

Recent years have brought a sharp uptick in the number of people interested in the policies and ideas of the political left. In order to clarify some basic points of confusion, and provide answers to some frequently asked questions, this short primer has been prepared. I encourage the reader to provide feedback if they feel that anything useful has been omitted. As always, all sources are listed at the end.

Question #1: What's Wrong With Capitalism?

In his 1936 [book](#) *The General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money*, the famed economist John Maynard Keynes noted that the main problems of laissez-faire capitalism are “its failure to provide for full employment and its arbitrary and inequitable distribution of wealth and incomes.” History has largely validated his words, as unemployment continues to plague society, and [inequality has skyrocketed](#) to levels not seen since the Great Depression. This trend towards highly inequitable growth has amounted to a massive [upward-redistribution of wealth](#), as top incomes have soared, while for those in the bottom-half, [“growth has been non-existent for a generation.”](#) Indeed, by some measures, [the living standards of the very poorest have actually declined in recent years](#), while according to the Urban Institute, [“nearly 40 percent of adults report that they or their families had trouble meeting at least one basic need”](#) in 2017. As the old adage goes, “the rich get richer, and the poor get poorer.”

To Keynes’ original list, we may wish to add systemic instability (as capitalism repeatedly falls prey to the [boom and bust cycle](#)), as well as a tendency to concentrate political power in the hands of a tiny elite. While we are continuously told that free-market economics are compatible with (and possibly even essential to) political democracy, the evidence strongly contradicts this point. Let’s take the United States as our example; according to a [study](#) from Princeton University, “the preferences of the average American appear to have only a minuscule, near-zero, statistically non-significant impact upon public policy.” As the study puts it:

We believe that if policy-making is dominated by powerful business organizations and a small number of affluent Americans, then America’s claims to being a democratic society are seriously threatened.

Similarly, a 2020 [study](#), published in the *Social Science Quarterly*, found that “the affluent have substantial influence over policy making while average Americans have little to no influence.”

This leads to widespread instability and political unrest, as [56% of the world's people now feel that capitalism does "more harm than good in the world."](#) In addition, [58% of the world's people are "dissatisfied" with how democracy is functioning in their country.](#)

Question #2: Why is Inequality a Bad Thing?

Inequality is a problem because it has demonstrable negative effects on society-at-large. These include [worse health outcomes](#) (including [shorter life expectancy](#), [higher general mortality](#), and [higher rates of depression](#) and [mental illness](#)), [reduced social mobility](#) (the so-called "[Great Gatsby Curve](#)"), [slower income growth for the poor](#), [lower levels of happiness](#) (an effect that [extends throughout society](#)), and [higher rates of violent crime](#).

There is even some evidence that inequality may be harmful to overall economic growth, though this point is more controversial. A 2014 [study](#) from the OECD found that "income inequality has a negative and statistically significant impact on subsequent growth," while a 2015 [paper](#) from the IMF found that "increasing the income share of the poor and the middle class actually increases growth while a rising income share of the top 20 percent results in lower growth—that is, when the rich get richer, benefits do not trickle down." These findings have been corroborated by other studies (see [here](#) and [here](#)), though they remain hotly contested.

Question #3: But Don't the Rich Benefit All of Us?

Not particularly, no. The idea that the rich will use their wealth for the benefit of society as a whole is often used to justify slashing their taxes and handing them more and more power over the rest of us; however, the evidence indicates that this view is misguided. For one thing, allowing the rich to get richer does not appear to benefit the economy. A 2020 [study](#) from the London School of Economics examined the impact of cutting taxes for the wealthy (using data from 18 OECD countries), with the following results:

We find that major reforms reducing taxes on the rich lead to higher income inequality as measured by the top 1% share of pre-tax national income. The effect remains stable in the medium term. In contrast, such reforms do not have any significant effect on economic growth and unemployment.

In other words, such policies increase inequality, without boosting growth or reducing unemployment. Similarly, a 2017 [paper](#) from the NBER found that cutting taxes for the rich has little-to-no positive impact on employment, while cutting taxes for working and middle-class people has a substantial positive impact. The true "job creators" of society are workers and consumers, not the rich.

In addition, the so-called "philanthropy" of the rich does much more to entrench their own power than it does to alleviate the suffering of the poor. According to a 2021 [meta-analysis](#) in the *International Journal of Management Reviews*, "elite philanthropy systemically concentrates power in the hands of mega foundations and the most prestigious endowed charitable organizations." The authors go on to state that "elite philanthropy functions to lock in and perpetuate inequalities rather than remedying them." The study concludes with some particularly harsh words:

Symbolic of a deeply dysfunctional world order, elite philanthropy promises salvation while legitimizing the continued existence of extreme inequalities, potentially fostering dependency. In short, the rich do little to benefit the rest of the population, and there is no good reason to reduce their taxes, deregulate their companies, and hand them more power over society as a whole.

Question #4: So What Do We Do About This?

It is important to remember that the political left is a very broad thing, encompassing many different schools of thought (including Marxists, social democrats, anarchists, and democratic socialists). These different factions obviously have very different overall policy recommendations, with some promoting social revolution, and others favoring more moderate reform. However, in spite of these differences, there are some points of general agreement.

For one thing, virtually all leftists agree that social welfare programs should be greatly expanded. Empirical evidence strongly supports the claim that [welfare programs reduce poverty](#), with some going so far as to label them "[the primary causal influence on national levels of poverty](#)." Welfare state generosity is [directly correlated with lower poverty among OECD nations](#), and there is strong evidence that the United States' [disadvantage in life expectancy](#) is related to its weak welfare state. This indicates that stronger social programs would [greatly increase life expectancy](#). Contrary to popular belief, the welfare state also [greatly reduces crime](#), while more generous welfare spending is associated with [higher average life satisfaction](#) among the population. To quote the linked study:

We thus echo Einstein by concluding that socialism (at least as represented by its social democratic incarnation) provides what is perhaps our best hope for improving the human condition, in so far as we agree that making "life as satisfying as possible" is the appropriate standard of evaluation.

In addition, leftists generally agree that labor unions should be significantly strengthened. Studies suggest that unions are associated with [higher wages and productivity](#), [reduced workplace fatalities](#), and [lower rates of suicide and drug overdose](#). Unions also [greatly reduce](#)

[income inequality](#), [improve political representation for workers](#), and [raise the political consciousness of their members](#).

Focusing in on the United States, leftists support the adoption of a single-payer healthcare system, which studies suggest would [save tens of thousands of lives every year](#), while [greatly reducing healthcare spending](#). The current American healthcare system is [“inefficient, unaffordable, unsustainable, and inaccessible to many,”](#) and as such, it must be replaced. We also generally support a strong increase in the minimum wage, which evidence suggests would [substantially raise incomes](#), [reduce poverty](#), improve both [physical](#) and [mental health](#), and [reduce inequality](#), with [little-to-no impact on unemployment](#) and [cost of living](#). There are, of course, many other policies advocated by those on the political left, but these are some points of general agreement.

Conclusion

I hope that this primer has proved useful in answering some basic questions, and providing some much-needed clarification on basic points of leftist ideology. If the reader has noticed any problems or omissions, I encourage them to leave a comment and point them out.

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Refuting Common Anti-Socialist Talking Points

Introduction

Anyone engaging in political discussion (both online and off) will be aware of certain classic right-wing and liberal talking points, which are often used to hand-wave away arguments and evidence provided by socialists. In order to deal with these common points, it is necessary to make a brief survey of the evidence. As always, all sources will be listed at the end.

Talking Point #1: "Socialism Always Fails, Just Look at Venezuela!"

It is quite interesting that people use Venezuela as proof that "socialism always fails," seeing as just about every other Latin American socialist government has done exceptionally well. This point has been made by Venezuelan writers themselves; in an [article](#) for the *Washington Post* (appropriately titled "No, Venezuela doesn't prove anything about socialism"), the anti-Chavista journalist Francisco Toro writes that he is "revulsed" by right-wing talking points surrounding Venezuela, stating:

It's appalling to see my country's suffering leveraged for cheap partisan point-scoring. [...] Since the turn of the century, every big country in South America except Colombia has elected a socialist president at some point... the supposedly automatic link between socialism and the zombie apocalypse skipped all of them. Not content with merely not-collapsing, a number of these countries have thrived.

Toro's words are well-supported by the empirical evidence. According to a [report](#) from the Center for Economic and Policy Research (issued only a few months before the right-wing coup that overthrew Evo Morales), Bolivia's socialist government massively increased GDP-per-capita and cut poverty in half:

Real (inflation-adjusted) per capita GDP grew by more than 50 percent over these past 13 years. [...] Even as the Latin American regional economy slowed over the past five years, Bolivia had the highest growth of per capita GDP in South America. [...] The country's solid economic growth has contributed substantially to the reduction of poverty and extreme poverty. The poverty rate has fallen below 35 percent (down from 60 percent in 2006) and the extreme poverty rate is 15.2 percent (down from 37.7 percent in 2006).

These achievements were made possible by the wide-spread social and economic reforms put into place by the socialist government. To quote the aforementioned report:

Bolivia's economic transformation was possible due to overarching political transformations in the country. These included a new constitution with significant economic mandates; nationalization and public ownership of natural resources and some strategic sectors of the economy; redistributive public investment and wage policies; policy coordination between the Central Bank and the Finance Ministry; and monetary and exchange rate policies directed toward de-dollarizing the Bolivian financial system.

The socialist government in Ecuador, led by President Rafael Correa, achieved similarly positive results. According to a CEPR [report](#) on the topic:

The poverty rate declined by 38 percent, and extreme poverty by 47 percent. [...] The reduction in poverty was many times larger than that of the previous decade. Inequality also fell substantially.

Lula da Silva's government in Brazil took millions of people out of poverty, overseeing what the World Bank [called](#) the "golden decade," with high economic growth and increases to social spending. According to a [report](#) from the World Bank:

Brazil's conditional cash transfer (CCT) program Bolsa Familia helped millions out of the poverty and is among the most effective social protection programs in the world, having helped raise approximately 20 million people out of poverty between 2003 and 2009 as well as significantly reducing income inequality.

As one [article](#) on Lula's presidency notes:

On his eight-year watch, the economy boomed, poverty plunged and incomes and living standards soared. Lula left office in January 2011 with an 83 percent favorability rating.

The leftist government in Uruguay (most notably under President Jose Mujica) oversaw a high rate of economic growth, and a sharp decline in poverty. According to an [article](#) in the *Guardian*, poverty declined from 40% to 12% under the leftist government. The article goes on:

Acute poverty has declined tenfold over the same period. The boom has coincided with the presidencies of Mujica and Vázquez, when the economy has grown by 75%, and public spending increased by almost 50%. Uruguay's wealth gap has also closed, not least because Vázquez's government introduced the country's first income tax. Social spending has surged, targeting the poorest. All Uruguayan schoolchildren have free laptops, though parts of the school system remain dysfunctional.

All of this is not even mentioning the impact of US sanctions on Venezuela, which, while certainly not the sole cause of the crisis, *have* contributed greatly to the country's economic decline. According to a 2021 [report](#) from the US Government Accountability Office:

The Venezuelan economy's performance has declined steadily for almost a decade and fallen steeply since the imposition of a series of U.S. sanctions starting in 2015. [...] The sanctions, particularly on the state oil company in 2019, likely contributed to the steeper decline of the Venezuelan economy, primarily by limiting revenue from oil production.

Overall, the socialist governments of Latin America have had some rather striking successes, and did a great deal to reduce poverty and inequality throughout the region. To call the entire Pink Tide a failure because of the crisis in Venezuela, especially when that crisis is driven in-part by US sanctions, is intellectual dishonesty, plain and simple.

Talking Point #2: "The Nazis Were Socialists!"

This claim comes from the fact that the Nazis included the word "socialist" in the name of their party, in an attempt to curry favor with working-class voters (something that they were [mocked for at the time](#)). Despite what this name may have implied, in reality the Nazis favored privatization and opposed socialist economics in every way they could. According to a [study](#) published in *The Journal of Economic History*:

Available sources make perfectly clear that the Nazi regime did not want at all a German economy with public ownership of many or all enterprises. Therefore it generally had no intention whatsoever of nationalizing private firms or creating state firms. On the contrary the reprivatization of enterprises was furthered wherever possible.

Nazi ideology, as well as practical policy, emphasized the role of private businesses:

Irrespective of a quite bad overall performance, an important characteristic of the economy of the Third Reich, and a big difference from a centrally planned one, was the role private ownership of firms was playing - in practice as well as in theory. The ideal Nazi economy would liberate the creativeness of a multitude of private entrepreneurs in a predominantly competitive framework gently directed by the state to achieve the highest welfare of the Germanic people.

On the rare occasions when they were forced to make use of state-owned factories, they included a contract option allowing private owners to purchase it. In addition, they avoided the creation of state-owned enterprises whenever possible, favoring private investment:

State-owned plants were to be avoided wherever possible. Nevertheless, sometimes they were necessary when private industry was not prepared to realize a war-related investment on its own. In

these cases, the Reich often insisted on the inclusion in the contract of an option clause according to which the private firm operating the plant was entitled to purchase it. Even the establishment of Reichswerke Hermann Goring in 1937 is no contradiction to the rule that the Reich principally did not want public ownership of enterprises. The Reich in fact tried hard to win the German industry over to engage in the project.

These findings are backed up by another [study](#), this one from the *Economic History Review*. According to this paper, not only did the Nazis favor privatization, they did so in a time when other capitalist governments were generally *expanding* public ownership, nationalizing various industries, etc. Nazi privatization was actually "against the mainstream," as they call it: The Nazi regime transferred public ownership and public services to the private sector. In doing so, they went against the mainstream trends in the Western capitalist countries, none of which systematically reprivatized firms during the 1930s. Privatization in Nazi Germany was also unique in transferring to private hands the delivery of public services previously provided by government. The firms and the services transferred to private ownership belonged to diverse sectors.

Libertarians and conservatives often make the argument that while Nazi Germany did have private ownership, it was so heavily curtailed and directed by the state that the economy was *effectively* state-run. However, the empirical evidence does not support this claim. To quote the aforementioned study from *The Journal of Economic History*:

Private property in the industry of the Third Reich is often considered a mere nominal provision without much substance. However, that is not correct, because firms, despite the rationing and licensing activities of the state, still had ample scope to devise their own production and investment profiles. Even regarding war-related projects, freedom of contract was generally respected; instead of using power, the state offered firms a number of contract options to choose from.

In a 1923 [interview](#) with George Sylvester Viereck, Hitler stated that Nazism "unlike Marxism, does not repudiate private property. Unlike Marxism, it involves no negation of personality, and unlike Marxism, it is patriotic. We might have called ourselves the Liberal Party. We chose to call ourselves the National Socialists." In this quote, Hitler not only states that Nazism affirms the right to private property (thus automatically distinguishing it from socialism), but admits that the term "National Socialism" was essentially arbitrary. This is far from the only anti-socialist statement from Hitler; in a 1935 [speech](#) to the Reichstag, he said:

We National Socialists see in private property a higher level of human economic development that according to the differences in performance controls the management of what has been accomplished enabling and guaranteeing the advantage of a higher standard of living for everyone. Bolshevism destroys not only private property but also private initiative and the readiness to shoulder responsibility.

In addition, the book *Hitler's Table Talk* includes the following statement:

I absolutely insist on protecting private property. It is natural and salutary that the individual should be inspired by the wish to devote a part of the income from his work to building up and expanding a family estate. Suppose the estate consists of a factory. I regard it as axiomatic, in the ordinary way, that this factory will be better run by one of the members of the family than it would be by a State functionary—providing, of course, that the family remains healthy. In this sense, we must encourage private initiative.

In addition, there is strong evidence that fascist parties (such as the Nazis) received their support from right-wing voters and large capitalists. A 2020 [paper](#) from the National Bureau of Economic Research examined fascism in Italy and Germany, finding that "center-right and right-wing voters coalesced around the Fascist Party," and that "landowner associations and greater presence of local elites played an important role in the rise of Fascism."

In other words, the Nazis had no issues with private property; they cared only about "racial purity," and exterminating those who did not fit their warped notions of ethnic propriety. In addition, they (like other fascists) derived their support from right-wing voters and capitalists.

Talking Point #3: "Socialism = No iPhone!"

In her [book](#) *The Entrepreneurial State*, the economist Marianna Mazzucato notes that technological innovations (such as those that produced the iPhone) have overwhelmingly involved large directing action by the state. In a summary [article](#), published in the *Guardian*, Mazzucato says the following:

[All] the technologies that make the iPhone so smart were indeed pioneered by a well-funded US government: the internet, GPS, touch-screen display, and even the latest Siri voice-activated personal assistant. All of these came out of agencies that were driven by missions, mainly around security – and funding not only the upstream "public good" research but also applied research and early-stage funding for companies.

In other words, active industrial policy and public action provided the basis for modern technological innovations. It was not the work of scrappy entrepreneurs sitting in garages (an idea which was largely the work of [clever marketing](#)); rather, it was government funding and intervention that spawned many of these ideas and products that we now take for granted. The idea that socialism (i.e. the expansion of public control over the economy) would somehow have prevented the development of this technology is nonsensical.

Talking Point #4: "What About Human Nature?"

This argument assumes that human nature is primarily selfish, focused entirely on the accumulation of personal wealth, with no consideration for the common good. However, this is not the case: altruism plays an important role in human nature, which is itself largely environmentally and culturally determined. To quote an [article](#) in *Nature*:

Experimental evidence indicates that human altruism is a powerful force and is unique in the animal world. [...] Current gene-based evolutionary theories cannot explain important patterns of human altruism, pointing towards the importance of both theories of cultural evolution as well as gene-culture co-evolution.

This idea has been validated by more recent research. An [article](#) in *Science*, reporting on a study from the University of Zurich, had the following to say:

Humans are generally highly cooperative and often impressively altruistic, quicker than any other animal species to help out strangers in need.

In addition, there is evidence that large inequalities (such as those produced by free-market capitalism) are psychologically harmful to human beings. Inequality is strongly linked to [higher rates of depression](#) and [mental illness](#), as well as [lower levels of happiness](#) (an effect that [extends throughout society](#)). This indicates that, if anything, it is *capitalism* which goes against human nature.

Conclusion

Hopefully this post has clarified some matters of confusion and corrected some widespread misconceptions. If the reader notices any problems or omissions, I encourage them to let me know, and I will do my best to address their concerns.

Sources

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The Most Common Anti-Socialist Myths: A Response (With Sources)

Introduction

Hello everyone. I just wanted to provide some quick sources to refute the most common anti-socialist myths tossed around online, as a quick reference for arguments with liberals and reactionaries. I hope you all find it useful.

Myth #1: Capitalism and Liberal Democracy Are Popular

According to a recent survey conducted by Edelman (the world's largest PR firm, based in the United States), [56% of the world's people feel that capitalism does "more harm than good in the world."](#)

In addition, a recent survey from Cambridge found that [58% of the world's people are "dissatisfied" with liberal democracy](#). These figures indicate growing global discontent with the capitalist system.

Myth #2: Capitalism is Democratic

The evidence overwhelmingly contradicts this point. Let's take the United States as our example; according to a [study](#) from Princeton University, "the preferences of the average American appear to have only a minuscule, near-zero, statistically non-significant impact upon public policy." As the study puts it:

We believe that if policy-making is dominated by powerful business organizations and a small number of affluent Americans, then America's claims to being a democratic society are seriously threatened.

Similarly, a 2020 [study](#), published in the *Social Science Quarterly*, found that "the affluent have substantial influence over policy making while average Americans have little to no influence." In addition, a [study](#) from Northwestern University found that the wealthy "are extremely active politically and that they are much more conservative than the American public as a whole with respect to important policies concerning taxation, economic regulation, and especially social welfare programs." They also state:

We suggest that these distinctive policy preferences may help account for why certain public policies in the United States appear to deviate from what the majority of US citizens wants the government to do. If this is so, it raises serious issues for democratic theory.

The people as a whole support significantly more left-wing policies (according to the above study, more than half of all Americans support state-run universal healthcare, wealth redistribution, and a jobs guarantee), but these policies are blocked by the ruling class. These issues can be expected to occur in other capitalist nations as well.

Myth #3: Socialism is Inefficient

There are several forms of socialist ownership, including public (i.e. state) ownership, and direct worker ownership. In order to refute the myth that socialism is inefficient, it is useful to look at both of these forms, starting with public ownership.

A 2015 [meta-analysis](#), published in the *Annals of Public and Cooperative Economics*, found that "with regard to productivity and production cost, there is no support for the claim that private enterprises have better performance [all things being equal] than public enterprises." According to a [paper](#) from the United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs (authored by an economist from the University of Cambridge), "there is no clear systematic evidence that SOEs are burdens on the economy." As the paper points out:

Despite popular perception, encouraged by the business media and contemporary conventional wisdom and rhetoric, SOEs can be efficient and well-run. [...] Many countries achieved economic success with a large SOE sector. [...] Conversely, many unsuccessful economies have small SOE sectors.

A [study](#) from Stanford University's Center on Global Poverty and Development evaluated both public and private enterprises in China, finding the former to be significantly more productive, even when controlling for favorable market conditions and better management:

[Labor] productivity and TFP of SOEs are significantly higher than private firms... although better human capital, more market power and better management can explain partially why productivity in SOEs are higher, there remains a large share of the SOE advantage in productivity that is still left unexplained.

A [study](#) in the *International Journal of Social Economics* looked at public enterprises in the OECD, finding that "the evidence fails to support the hypothesis of a negative relationship between [public enterprises] and economic growth."

Similarly, a more recent [study](#) looked at SOEs in China, and found that while they are less *profitable* than private firms, they also generate positive spillover effects that benefit the overall economy. To quote:

Since these two effects offset each other, the contribution of SOEs to economic growth in China during our sample time frame was not significantly different from that of non-state enterprises.

Evidence is particularly strong that public ownership is preferable in the case of natural monopolies. Utilities are a good example; according to a [study](#) in the *Journal of Public Economics*, "public firms minimize cost and have 24–33% lower per unit costs than their privately owned counterpart." A more recent [study](#) in the journal *Applied Economics* found that "private management are on average slightly less efficient than public management."

In addition, direct worker-ownership (i.e. cooperative ownership) is consistently found to be superior to capitalist ownership. A [study](#) in Cornell University's *ILR Review* found that "profit sharing, worker ownership, and worker participation in decision making are all positively associated with productivity." Another [study](#) in the same journal notes that worker-owned enterprises are far less likely to fail than are traditional capitalist enterprises, meaning that "the marginal presence of [cooperatives] in actual market economies cannot be explained by the fact that these firms are less likely to survive than conventional firms."

Myth #4: Capitalism Meets Human Needs Better Than Socialism

Socialism has been consistently superior to capitalism in terms of meeting human needs. According to a [study](#) by Vicente Navarro (Johns Hopkins University), published in the *International Journal of Health Services*, "contrary to dominant ideology, socialism and socialist forces have been, for the most part, better able to improve health conditions than have capitalism and capitalist forces." He states that "the historical experience of socialism has not been one of failure. To the contrary: it has been, for the most part, more successful than capitalism in improving the health conditions of the world's populations."

A well-known [study](#) published in the *American Journal of Public Health* found that "socialist countries generally have achieved better PQL [physical quality of life] outcomes than the capitalist countries at equivalent levels of economic development." These results were verified in a later follow-up [study](#), published in the *International Journal of Health Services*, which found that "in general, nations with strong left-wing regimes have more favorable health outcomes (e.g., longer life expectancies and lower mortality rates) than do those with strong right-wing regimes."

Nobel-winning economist Amartya Sen (Harvard University) authored a [study](#) looking at quality of life in developing countries. He found that "Clearly the relative performance of

communist countries is superior," prompting him to remark, "One thought that is bound to occur is that communism is good for poverty removal." Similarly, a [study](#) published in the journal *Population and Development Review* observed "a general association between communism and low mortality, at least among poor countries."

Even reformist policies (insufficient though they are) can have a positive effect. A [study](#) in the journal *Perspectives on Politics* found that "citizens find life more rewarding as the generosity of the welfare state increases." The authors then say the following:

We thus echo Einstein by concluding that socialism (at least as represented by its social democratic incarnation) provides what is perhaps our best hope for improving the human condition, in so far as we agree that making "life as satisfying as possible" is the appropriate standard of evaluation.

Another [study](#), published in the *International Journal of Health Services*, found that "political traditions more committed to redistributive policies (both economic and social) and full-employment policies, such as the social democratic parties, were generally more successful in improving the health of populations."

In addition, there is evidence that public employment (associated with a larger SOE sector) has a beneficial impact on health and welfare. A 2019 [study](#) in the *International Journal of Health Services* found that "public employment, as an instrument of pro-redistributive policies in both the labor market and the welfare state, improves equality and ultimately health." The authors note that "population health measured by life expectancy improves with the size of public employment."

State-owned enterprises also help to reduce inequality. A 2020 [paper](#) in *The North American Journal of Economics and Finance* found that "an expansion of China's public employment reduces the dispersion of wage income and hence alleviates income inequality in China." In addition, a 2007 [study](#) from China's Tsinghua University found that "SOEs contribute significantly and positively to income equality."

Finally, there is significant evidence that capitalist policies have a detrimental effect on health, particularly as they result in inequality. According to a [study](#) published in the *International Journal of Health Services*, "there is a strong correlation between income inequality and [negative] health outcomes." In addition, they found that "countries that do not use International Monetary Fund loans perform better on health outcomes." Another [study](#), this one published in the journal *Social Science and Medicine*, found that "large income differences have damaging health and social consequences," and that "Narrowing the gap will improve the health and wellbeing of populations."

Myth #5: Capitalism is Eliminating Global Poverty

This is a comforting myth, with no basis whatsoever in reality. The facts paint a far grimmer picture of global poverty; Philip Alston, the UN's Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, had this to say in his most recent [report](#) on the matter:

By single-mindedly focusing on the World Bank's flawed international poverty line, the international community mistakenly gauges progress in eliminating poverty by reference to a standard of miserable subsistence rather than an even minimally adequate standard of living. This in turn facilitates greatly exaggerated claims about the impending eradication of extreme poverty and downplays the parlous state of impoverishment in which billions of people still subsist. [...] Using a more defensible line generates a radically different understanding of progress against poverty. Even under the Bank's line, the figures are terrible: 700 million people living under \$1.90 a day is abhorrent. But, using more realistic measures, the extent of global poverty is vastly higher and the trends discouraging.

He goes on to recommend a series of policies which, in his view, will help improve our efforts to reduce global poverty:

Poverty is a political choice and its elimination requires: (i) reconceiving the relationship between growth and poverty elimination; (ii) tackling inequality and embracing redistribution; (iii) promoting tax justice; (iv) implementing universal social protection; (v) centering the role of government; (vi) embracing participatory governance; and (vii) adapting international poverty measurement.

This has been explained by other experts as well. According to an [article](#) by anthropologist Jason Hickel (London School of Economics), global poverty is significantly higher than most people believe, due to the absurdly low poverty line used by the World Bank (\$1.90 a day). As he puts it:

It's obscenely low by any standard, and we now have piles of evidence that people living just above this line have terrible levels of malnutrition and mortality. Earning \$2 per day doesn't mean that you're somehow suddenly free of extreme poverty. Not by a long shot.

If a more reasonable poverty standard (such as \$7.40) is used, "we see that the number of people living under this line has increased dramatically since measurements began in 1981, reaching some 4.2 billion people today." It must also be noted that most actual poverty reduction since 1981 has occurred in China, which is hardly a free market society (five-year plans are still drawn up, and the state still owns most strategic industries). As Hickel puts it: Moreover, the few gains that have been made have virtually all happened in one place: China. It is disingenuous, then, for the likes of Gates and Pinker to claim these gains as victories for Washington-consensus neoliberalism. Take China out of the equation, and the numbers look even worse. Over the four decades since 1981, not only has the number of people in poverty

gone up, the proportion of people in poverty has remained stagnant at about 60%. It would be difficult to overstate the suffering that these numbers represent.

Finally, according to a [study](#) published in the *World Social and Economic Review*, eliminating global poverty will be functionally impossible without a significant reduction in global inequality:

Poverty eradication, even at \$1.25-a-day, and especially at a poverty line which better reflects the satisfaction of basic needs, can be reconciled with global carbon constraints only by a major increase in the share of the poorest in global economic growth, far beyond what can realistically be achieved by existing instruments of development policy – that is, by effective measures to reduce global inequality.

These facts make a continued capitalist model highly untenable.

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Socialism is Good For You: Health, Welfare, and Quality of Life

Introduction

Hello everybody. When discussing a contentious political issue, it is often useful to examine the empirical evidence before coming to a conclusion. Seeing as healthcare is consistently ranked

as [one of the most important issues](#) in nations like the USA, it will be helpful to examine the matter more closely, to determine what socialism has to offer here. Feel free to use [Sci-Hub](#) to bypass any paywalls.

Socialism, Health, and Welfare

According to a [study](#) by Vicente Navarro (Johns Hopkins University), published in the *International Journal of Health Services*, "contrary to dominant ideology, socialism and socialist forces have been, for the most part, better able to improve health conditions than have capitalism and capitalist forces." He states that "the historical experience of socialism has not been one of failure. To the contrary: it has been, for the most part, more successful than capitalism in improving the health conditions of the world's populations."

A well-known [study](#) published in the *American Journal of Public Health* found that "socialist countries generally have achieved better PQL [physical quality of life] outcomes than the capitalist countries at equivalent levels of economic development." These results were verified in a later follow-up [study](#), published in the *International Journal of Health Services*, which found that "in general, nations with strong left-wing regimes have more favorable health outcomes (e.g., longer life expectancies and lower mortality rates) than do those with strong right-wing regimes."

Nobel-winning economist Amartya Sen (Harvard University) authored a [study](#) looking at quality of life in developing countries. He found that "Clearly the relative performance of communist countries is superior," prompting him to remark, "One thought that is bound to occur is that communism is good for poverty removal." Similarly, a [study](#) published in the journal *Population and Development Review* observed "a general association between communism and low mortality, at least among poor countries."

Even reformist policies (insufficient though they are) can have a positive effect. One [study](#) from Texas A&M University found that "citizens find life more rewarding as the generosity of the welfare state increases," concluding that "socialism... provides the potential for improving the human condition, in so far as we agree that making 'life as satisfying as possible' is the appropriate standard of evaluation."

Another [study](#), published in the *International Journal of Health Services*, found that "political traditions more committed to redistributive policies (both economic and social) and full-employment policies, such as the social democratic parties, were generally more successful in improving the health of populations."

Capitalism's Harmful Impact

There is significant evidence that capitalist policies have a detrimental effect on health, particularly as they result in inequality. According to a [study](#) published in the *International Journal of Health Services*, "there is a strong correlation between income inequality and [negative] health outcomes." In addition, they found that "countries that do not use International Monetary Fund loans perform better on health outcomes." Another [study](#), this one published in the journal *Social Science and Medicine*, found that "large income differences have damaging health and social consequences," and that "Narrowing the gap will improve the health and wellbeing of populations."

Conclusion

In short, socialism provides the best means of achieving high quality-of-life and good health outcomes, compared to capitalism.

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Refuting Myths About Welfare, Poverty, and Employment

"The daily struggle for reforms, for the amelioration of the condition of the workers within the framework of the existing social order, and for democratic institutions, offers to the [socialist movement] the only means of engaging in the proletarian class war and working in the direction of the final goal – the conquest of political power and the suppression of wage labour. Between social reforms and revolution there exists

for the [socialist movement] an indissoluble tie. The struggle for reforms is its means; the social revolution, its aim." - Rosa Luxemburg, Reform or Revolution

Introduction

Social welfare programs have long been viewed as a way of papering over the cracks of capitalism, by seeking to provide a decent standard of living to everybody, regardless of income or employment status. Even socialists (who would like to transcend capitalism altogether, rather than patching up its holes) nevertheless would generally prefer that these programs exist, as the alternative (unmitigated capitalism) is so horrible as to be worth avoiding at any cost.

Of course, there are many people (liberals and conservatives alike) who would seek to scale-back, eliminate, or "reform" these programs, and subject the working class to the unbridled forces of the free-market. They justify their views with a series of slanders and distortions, from claiming that welfare policies do not reduce poverty, to claiming that they prevent people from working. In order to defend against these reactionary attacks on the social safety net, it is worth taking the time to refute these myths. All sources are listed at the end.

Myth #1: "Welfare Programs Don't Reduce Poverty!"

The overwhelming majority of studies on this topic suggest that welfare policies *do* reduce poverty. A 1999 [study](#) in the journal *Social Forces* assessed the available evidence, finding that the results "strongly support the conventional view that social-welfare programs reduce poverty." In addition, a 2003 [study](#) in the *American Sociological Review* found that a robust welfare state, as well as left-wing policies more broadly, had a strong impact on poverty reduction:

The more generous the welfare state, the greater is the extent of poverty reduction. In addition, long-term incumbency of left parties affects poverty reduction positively by giving the tax and transfer system a particularly redistributive profile.

Another 2003 [study](#), this one in the journal *Social Forces*, corroborates these findings; to quote, "the strength of left political institutions has a significant, powerful negative impact on poverty." A 2005 [study](#), also from *Social Forces*, found once more that "social security transfers and public health spending significantly reduce poverty," stating that welfare policies are "the primary causal influence on national levels of poverty."

A 2006 [study](#) in the journal *Comparative Political Studies* looked at welfare state generosity and poverty in sixteen OECD countries, finding that "more generous entitlements to key social insurance programs are associated not only with lower relative poverty but also with lower

absolute poverty. This supports the contention that promoting relative economic equality can improve the absolute material well-being of the poor.”

A 2009 [study](#) in the journal *Social Forces* found that “Leftist parties and union density reduce the odds of poverty,” primarily by increasing the generosity of welfare policies. In addition, the study found that “welfare generosity reduces the extent to which low education and the number of children increase poverty. Also, welfare generosity reduces poverty among those with low education, single-mother households and young households.”

The poverty-reducing impact of the welfare state has become especially important in recent decades, as [labor compensation has decoupled from productivity](#), and [real incomes for the bottom 50% of workers have begun to fall](#). A 2013 [study](#) from Columbia University traced poverty in the United States from 1967 to 2011, and found that:

[W]ithout taxes and other government programs, poverty would have been roughly flat at 27–29%, while with government benefits poverty has fallen from 26% to 16% — a 40% reduction. Government programs today are cutting poverty nearly in half (from 29% to 16%) while in 1967 they only cut poverty by about a one percentage point.

In other words, while market incomes have been stagnant (and would thus have failed to reduce poverty), welfare programs have been able to make a significant (albeit insufficient) dent. These findings are corroborated by a 2019 [report](#) from the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, which found the following:

*Using a version of the federal government’s Supplemental Poverty Measure (SPM) — a more comprehensive metric than the official poverty measure — we calculate that the poverty rate has fallen by nearly half since 1967, largely due to the growing effectiveness of economic security programs such as Social Security, food assistance, and tax credits for working families. Poverty fell from 26.0 percent in 1967 to 14.4 percent in 2017 by this measure. **Most of the improvement came from economic security programs. Earnings and other non-government sources of income did not improve sufficiently over this period to reduce poverty substantially.***

Similarly, a 2018 [analysis](#) from Georgetown University and the World Bank found that “the level of living of America’s poorest has fallen,” and that “without [food stamps], the floor would have fallen even further in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis.” These results are deeply troubling, as they show how capitalism, left to its own devices, allows poverty to stagnate and even worsen over time. However, these findings also provide additional evidence that social welfare programs can have a strong effect on poverty reduction.

In addition, there is robust evidence that welfare programs have a beneficial impact on health and wellbeing (both physical and mental). A 2016 [study](#) in the journal *Social Science and*

Medicine found that the United States' stingy welfare state is taking a serious toll on population health, and that "life expectancy in the US would be approximately 3.77 years longer, if it had just the average social policy generosity of the other 17 OECD nations."

Similarly, a 2008 [study](#) in the journal *Perspectives on Politics* found that "citizens find life more rewarding as the generosity of the welfare state increases, net of economic or cultural conditions." The authors continue:

We thus echo Einstein by concluding that socialism (at least as represented by its social democratic incarnation) provides what is perhaps our best hope for improving the human condition, in so far as we agree that making "life as satisfying as possible" is the appropriate standard of evaluation.

All-in-all, the evidence on this point is remarkably clear: welfare policies do in fact reduce poverty, and they do so quite effectively. They also substantially increase population health and overall life satisfaction.

Myth #2: "Welfare Policies Discourage People from Working!"

There is very little evidence of this, and even some strong evidence against it. A 2014 [study](#) in the journal *Work, Employment, and Society* found evidence of "increasing employment commitment as social spending gets more generous and activating." The authors went on to say that "the notion that big welfare states are associated with widespread cultures of dependency, or other adverse consequences of poor short term incentives to work, receives little support. On the contrary, employment commitment was much higher in all the studied groups in bigger welfare states and social differences were mostly smaller or did not vary across welfare states."

In addition, another [study](#) conducted by researchers at Harvard and MIT found "no systematic evidence that cash transfer programs discourage work." Together, these studies demonstrate quite clearly that welfare policies do not discourage work; if anything, they seem to *increase* people's desire to find employment.

In addition, there is significant evidence that a strong social safety net increases the quality of employment, by allowing people to search for a higher-quality job. A 2018 [study](#) from Georgetown University and the National Bureau of Economic Research look at the effects unemployment insurance (UI), and found that "longer UI duration increases wages in the job immediately after and up to one year after unemployment and reduces separations to unemployment one year after exiting unemployment." In other words, UI benefits helped people find better paying and more secure jobs. Similarly, a 2004 [study](#) from *The Journal of Human Resources* found that "greater UI generosity leads to longer job tenure." This demonstrates that UI benefits help people to find jobs that suit them.

Myth #3: "Welfare Policies Are Bad for the Economy!"

Aside from the obvious benefits of reducing poverty and inequality, there is a large amount of evidence against the idea that welfare policies reduce growth. A 2014 [study](#) from the OECD found that while "income inequality has a negative and statistically significant impact on subsequent growth," redistributive policies "need not be expected to undermine growth." In fact, the study notes that such policies "are a key tool to ensure the benefits of growth are more broadly distributed."

A 2005 [study](#) in the *International Journal of Health Services* compared the liberal American model to the social democratic European model, finding that "the liberal, U.S. model has been less efficient economically (slower economic growth, higher unemployment) than the social model in existence in the European Union and in the majority of its member states." This is further evidence against the idea that a strong welfare state would harm the economy.

Conclusion

While welfare policies are certainly insufficient from a socialist perspective, they are an nonetheless important way to ameliorate the conditions of the working class in capitalist societies. In addition, they help to increase the class power of the workers, by reducing the dependence of the working class on market forces and bourgeois charity. As such, it is important that all people be properly informed on this topic, and see to it that conservative and neoliberal attacks on these institutions are not successful.

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Studies and Sources on the Benefits of Labor Unions

Introduction

The American labor movement has been in a steady decline over the last several decades. Despite the fact that [most Americans have a positive view of labor unions](#), membership has fallen dramatically since its peak in 1954 (when it stood at about 34.8% of the workforce),

reaching a dismal low of 10.7% in 2017. With the topic of unionization (along with labor issues more broadly) re-entering the public discourse over the past few years, it is worth taking a look at the extensive and well-documented benefits of unions, in order to remind people of *why* they think fondly of these institutions, and hopefully inspire them to put their favorable views into practice by becoming members.

Economic and Social Benefits of Unions

Firstly, unions have a positive impact at the workplace, with benefits ranging from higher wages and better job safety, to higher productivity and output. A 2020 [study](#) in *The Economic Journal* found that “increasing union density at the firm level leads to a substantial increase in both productivity and wages,” while a 2017 [study](#) in *The British Medical Journal* (conducted at Harvard University) found that reduced union membership (caused primarily by the proliferation of so-called “right to work” laws) has led to a 14.2% increase in workplace fatalities since 1992. Even in times of relative weakness for the labor movement, unions continue to have a positive effect; a 2017 [study](#) in the journal *Social Forces* found that “unions use non-market sources of power to pressure companies into raising wages... even in a period of labor weakness unions still play a role in setting wages for their members.”

Unions also produce social benefits; according to a 2019 [study](#) in the *American Journal of Industrial Medicine*, “a 10% increase in union density was associated with a 17% relative decrease in overdose/suicide mortality.” In an era of ever-escalating mental health and substance abuse epidemics, this is important to keep in mind. In short, conditions, compensation, productivity, and output are *all* benefited by an increase in union membership, and this in turn has a host of positive economic and social effects.

Labor Unions and Inequality

Labor unions are also an extremely important tool for fighting inequality. A 2018 [study](#) from Princeton University found that “when unions expand, whether at the national level or the state level, they tend to draw in unskilled workers and raise their relative wages, with significant impacts on inequality.” The study also notes that “since at least the early twentieth century, U.S. income inequality has varied inversely with union density.” Another [paper](#) from the *Journal of Financial and Quantitative Analysis* found that “firms with strong unions pay their CEOs less.” Combining this with the positive impact of unionization on workers’ wages helps to explain their impact on inequality.

In addition, a 2020 [study](#) in the *American Journal of Sociology* found that “right to work laws work as intended, increasing economic inequality indirectly by lowering labor power resources.” In other words, increasing unionization reduces inequality, while measures to lower unionization rates (such as right to work laws) lead to an increase in inequality. When one considers the

well-documented harmful effects of inequality (ranging from [worse health outcomes](#) to [slower economic growth](#)), the benefits of unions as they relate to inequality become all the clearer.

The Political Impact of Unionization

Finally, it must also be noted that unions have a significant impact in the political sphere. A 2020 [study](#) in the journal *Perspectives on Politics* found that “local unions significantly dampen unequal responsiveness to high incomes: a standard deviation increase in union membership increases legislative responsiveness towards the poor by about six to eight percentage points.” In other words, high rates of unionization force politicians to respond to the demands of the poor and working class. There is also a self-reinforcing element to this phenomenon; a 2020 [study](#) in the *Journal of Public Policy* found that “Republican governments are less likely to adopt restrictive policies when unions are strong and when union support among middle and low-income earners is high.” In other words, high levels of unionization and union support help to prevent right-wingers from implementing anti-union policies. This may lead to a gradual political shift towards the left, as the right’s ability to subvert the labor movement is reduced.

Unionized workers also tend to be more politically conscious; a 2019 [study](#) in the journal *Political Behavior* found that union members “are significantly more politically knowledgeable than their non-union counterparts and better informed about where political parties and candidates stand on the issues.” This trend was found to be particularly strong among “those with less formal education, who face higher costs in seeking out political information.” These factors may in turn lead to policies which reduce poverty and inequality; indeed, a 2003 [study](#) in the *American Sociological Review* found that “The extent of redistribution (measured as poverty reduction via taxes and transfers)” is determined, at least in part, by the strength of labor unions (as well as the political left more broadly). A 2019 [paper](#) from the *Social Science Quarterly* found that “where labor unions are stronger, higher levels of income inequality prompt greater support for welfare spending.” In other words, unions help to foster greater political education among their members, while increasing the representative power of the poor and working class. This in turn increases support for (and subsequent enactment of) redistributive policies, which greatly reduce poverty and inequality.

Conclusion

All in all, the evidence on labor unions is quite clear: they improve wages and working conditions; they raise productivity and output; they reduce inequality, suicide, and drug abuse; they give a organized voice to the working class, and they raise the political consciousness of their members. This helps to explain why the majority of the population has a positive view of labor unions; hopefully, by raising awareness of these facts, we can encourage people to

actually *join* unions, swelling the ranks of the labor movement, and contributing to the positive impacts discussed above.

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The Harmful Effects of Inequality

Introduction

Most people are aware that economic inequality has increased dramatically in recent years, due in large part to the rise of neoliberal policies in the 1970's and 1980's. According to a 2018 [paper](#) in *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*:

Income inequality has increased in many developed countries over the past several decades. [...] In the United States, the stagnation of bottom 50% incomes and the upsurge in the top 1% coincided

with reduced progressive taxation, widespread deregulation (particularly in the financial sector), weakened unions, and an erosion of the federal minimum wage.

With this in mind, it is important that we understand just why inequality is such a huge problem. While some (ranging from neoliberals and centrists to outright conservatives) have argued that inequality is not a problem, the facts do not support this view; rather, the evidence strongly indicates that inequality has a number of highly negative effects on a society.

Economic Impacts of Inequality

First of all, it must be noted that economic inequality has a harmful impact on the economy. According to a 2014 [study](#) from the OECD, "income inequality has a negative and statistically significant impact on subsequent growth." Interestingly, the same study found that while inequality harms growth, redistributive policies do not. To quote:

Redistribution policies via taxes and transfers are a key tool to ensure the benefits of growth are more broadly distributed and the results suggest they need not be expected to undermine growth.

Another 2014 [paper](#), authored by Branko Milanovic (Luxembourg Income Center) and Roy Van der Wilde (World Bank), argues that inequality results in slower income growth for the poor, but not for the rich. This means that without intervention, inequality can perpetuate itself by slowing down growth for those who most need it.

A 2016 [paper](#) in the journal *World Development* found that "the effect of inequality on growth is negative," and that this effect is "more pronounced in less developed countries" (i.e. those most in need of growth). Similarly, a 2017 [paper](#) in the journal *Research in Economics* found that "high initial levels of inequality limit the effectiveness of growth in reducing poverty while growing inequality increases poverty directly for a given level of growth." In other words, inequality sabotages economic growth and poverty-reduction efforts, particularly in the poorest countries, which are most in need of development.

Even the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which has spent decades pushing neoliberal policies around the world, has admitted the harmful effects of inequality. In a 2015 [paper](#) on the topic, they note that "increasing the income share of the poor and the middle class actually increases growth while a rising income share of the top 20 percent results in lower growth—that is, when the rich get richer, benefits do not trickle down." This same paper goes more into the causal mechanisms through which inequality harms economic growth:

Why would widening income disparities matter for growth? Higher inequality lowers growth by depriving the ability of lower-income households to stay healthy and accumulate physical and human capital (Galor and Moav 2004; Aghion, Caroli, and Garcia-Penalosa 1999). For instance, it

can lead to underinvestment in education as poor children end up in lower quality schools and are less able to go on to college. As a result, labor productivity could be lower than it would have been in a more equitable world (Stiglitz 2012). In the same vein, Corak (2013) finds that countries with higher levels of income inequality tend to have lower levels of mobility between generations, with parent's earnings being a more important determinant of children's earnings (Figure 1). Increasing concentration of incomes could also reduce aggregate demand and undermine growth, because the wealthy spend a lower fraction of their incomes than middle- and lower-income groups.

In short, there is a good deal of evidence in the economic literature to suggest that inequality has a deleterious impact on growth.

Inequality and Health

There is significant evidence that economic inequality has an adverse effect on health outcomes. A 1996 [study](#) in *The British Medical Journal* looked at data from the United States, finding that inequality worsened just about every observable outcome. To quote: There was a significant correlation ($r=0.62$, $P<0.001$) between the percentage of total household income received by the less well off 50% in each state and all cause mortality, unaffected by adjustment for state median incomes. Income inequality was also significantly associated with age specific mortalities and rates of low birth weight, homicide, violent crime, work disability, expenditures on medical care and police protection, smoking, and sedentary activity. Rates of unemployment, imprisonment, recipients of income assistance and food stamps, lack of medical insurance, and educational outcomes were also worse as income inequality increased. Income inequality was also associated with mortality trends, and there was a suggestion of an impact of inequality trends on mortality trends. [...] Economic policies that increase income inequality may also have a deleterious effect on population health.

A 2009 [study](#), also in *The British Medical Journal*, found that "there is an association between higher income inequality and worse health outcomes," noting that if this relationship is causal (which many studies suggest that it is), then "upwards of 1.5 million deaths (9.6% of adult mortality) could be averted in 30 OECD countries by leveling the Gini coefficient below the threshold value of 0.3."

A 2015 [study](#) in the journal *Social Science and Medicine* summarized prior research on the topic, concluding that inequality has a harmful impact on health. To quote:

The evidence that large income differences have damaging health and social consequences is strong and in most countries inequality is increasing. Narrowing the gap will improve the health and wellbeing of populations.

A 2016 [study](#) in the *International Journal of Health Services* looked at data from Latin America, and found that "there is a strong correlation between income inequality and [negative] health outcomes." This correlation is still apparent when controlling for other factors. To quote: The results show that... after controlling for gross national income per capita, literacy rate, and health expenditure, the Gini coefficient is independently negatively associated with health outcomes. In Latin American countries, for every percentage point increase in the Gini coefficient, the infant mortality rate grows by 0.467 deaths per 1,000 live births, holding all other variables constant.

In addition, they found that "countries that do not use International Monetary Fund loans perform better on health outcomes."

A 2017 [paper](#) in the *Lancet* summarizes the evidence on the topic, and recommends "interventions to decouple income and health, or to reduce inequalities in income," in order to avoid "the emergence of a 21st century health-poverty trap and the further widening and hardening of socioeconomic inequalities in health."

In addition, a 2018 [paper](#) in *The Social Science Journal* looks at the empirical evidence on the health impact of inequality (focusing on the USA), finding that inequality has "significant relationships with behavioral, physical, and mental health outcomes, including heavy drinking, obesity, exercise, diabetes, heart attack, heart disease, physical and mental health problems, and depression." The authors go on to state that "economic policies to address the rising income inequality in the United States might serve to also address some of our nation's most troubling health statistics."

All-in-all, the evidence is strong that inequality has a deleterious effect on population health. Reducing inequality is essential if we want to improve overall health outcomes.

Inequality and Social Mobility

Despite conservative whining about "equality of opportunity vs. equality of outcome," the economic evidence suggests that inequality actually *reduces* social mobility (i.e. "equality of opportunity"), a phenomenon that economists refer to as the "Great Gatsby curve." A 2013 [study](#) in the *Journal of Economic Perspectives* notes that "countries with more inequality at one point in time also experience less earnings mobility across the generations... This trend will likely continue unless there are changes in public policy that promote the human capital of children in a way that offers relatively greater benefits to the relatively disadvantaged." A 2018 [study](#) from the National Bureau of Economic Research provides more evidence for an intergenerational impact of inequality on social mobility. To quote, "inequality within one generation helps determine the level of mobility of its children... social influences on children create a nonlinear relationship between parental income and offspring income, so increases in

inequality, by altering the ways in which family income determines and interacts with social influences, reduce mobility."

A 2019 [study](#) in the *American Sociological Review* looked at inequality and social mobility in 39 countries, finding "a negative correlation between inter-class inequality and social fluidity," with inter-class inequality being more important than traditional distributional measures. All-in-all, there is clear evidence that reducing inequality will help to improve social mobility.

Solutions to Inequality

Now that we have gone over the numerous problems caused by inequality, it's worth taking some time to look at potential solutions. A recent United Nations [report](#) on the topic emphasizes policies such as increased access to education, strengthening workers' rights (including support for unions), and increased redistributive policies:

There is broad agreement on the importance of universal access to quality education to break the intergenerational cycle of growing inequality and promote inclusive development. [...] Governments and the international community must strengthen labour market institutions, including those that represent workers. Greater redistribution through taxes and public spending is urgently needed. Yet emphasis on balancing public budgets has often resulted in declines in social spending and investments in infrastructure. Social protection is a crucial element of national strategies to reduce inequality. Currently, only 45 per cent of the global population is effectively covered by at least one social protection benefit.

These recommendations are supported by other research. For instance, a 2018 [study](#) from Princeton University found that unions have a "significant, equalizing effect" on the distribution of income. A 2018 [study](#) in the journal *Sociological Forum* found that "the welfare state's generosity (measured as social protection spending) reduces income inequality," providing further evidence for the importance of social protection policies. Of course, one can also argue that the capitalist system *itself* is perpetuating social inequalities, and thus that its wholesale replacement may be a requirement for establishing a more just society.

How Much Has Inequality Increased?

In recent years, some have tried to argue that the increase in inequality has been overestimated, and that the distribution of income has been largely consistent over time. The most widely cited paper to make this argument is a 2018 working paper from Auten and Splinter, which offers a contrasting estimating to those of Piketty, Saez, and Zucman [PSZ]. However, their estimates are based on a number of "extreme and hence unrealistic assumptions," according to PSZ's 2019 [response](#) to Auten and Splinter.

Economist Bradford DeLong (UC Berkeley), who is far from a radical left-winger, supports PSZ's argument, noting that Auten and Splinter make a number of bizarre assumptions and alterations to the data in order to arrive at their lower estimates. He discusses this in more detail in a blog [post](#) on the topic, in which he states that "at the moment at least I find myself strongly on the side of Piketty, Saez, and Zucman in this disagreement."

In addition, a [report](#) from the Washington Center for Equitable Growth notes that the Congressional Budget Office and the Bureau of Economic Analysis have both come to estimates remarkably close to those of PSZ, and far away from those of Auten and Splinter. As such, "[Auten and Splinter's] findings are an outlier." The broad consensus is that economic inequality in the United States (and other major countries) has increased markedly in recent decades.

Conclusion

Having gone over all of the above information, it is clear that inequality is a harmful force in society. It increases poverty, slows growth, worsens health, increases crime and mental illness, and reduces social mobility. Reducing inequality is utterly essential if we are to have anything like a decent society.

Sources

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Studies and Sources on the Minimum Wage

Introduction

For the past several years, there has been an intense debate over whether or not there should be an increase in the United States' minimum wage. While the vast majority of Americans [favor raising the minimum wage to \\$15-an-hour](#), there have been those who claim that such a move would pose a threat to the economy, potentially causing massive job losses, and possibly even *reducing* incomes for low-wage workers. In order to assess the truth of these

claims, it is necessary to look through the available evidence on the topic. As always, all sources are listed at the end.

Does the Minimum Wage Cause Unemployment?

For many years, the majority of economists argued that the minimum wage caused higher unemployment, because it imposes a price floor, and therefore distorts the function of supply-and-demand. However, it eventually became apparent that the empirical research did not support this view. Most notably, a famous [study](#) by David Card and Alan Krueger (often simply called "the Card-Krueger study") examined the fast-food industries in New Jersey (which had raised its minimum wage from \$4.25 to \$5.05 per hour) and Pennsylvania (which had no such increase), with the following results:

Our empirical findings challenge the prediction that a rise in the minimum [wage] reduces employment. Relative to stores in Pennsylvania, fast food restaurants in New Jersey increased employment by 13 percent.

Two later meta-analyses of minimum wage studies, one from [Doucouliagos and Stanley](#), and another from [Card and Kruger](#) themselves, found no evidence of a negative impact on employment. In addition, both found substantial evidence of publication bias (i.e. a bias towards publishing negative results), which had likely contributed to the prior negative perception of minimum wage laws.

More recent studies have continued to support the finding that minimum wages do not notably increase unemployment. A 2010 [paper](#) from the UC Berkeley Institute for Research on Labor and Employment found "no detectable employment losses from the kind of minimum wage increases we have seen in the United States." The authors note that "traditional approaches that do not account for local economic conditions tend to produce spurious negative effects due to spatial heterogeneities in employment trends that are unrelated to minimum wage policies."

A 2019 [study](#) in *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* examined "138 prominent state-level minimum wage changes between 1979 and 2016 in the United States using a difference-in-differences approach," finding no evidence of a negative employment impact in most sectors. As they put it:

We find that the overall number of low-wage jobs remained essentially unchanged over the five years following the increase. [...] Our estimates by detailed demographic groups show that the lack of job loss is not explained by labor-labor substitution at the bottom of the wage distribution. We also find no evidence of disemployment when we consider higher levels of minimum wages. However, we do find some evidence of reduced employment in tradeable sectors.

A 2019 [study](#) from UCLA examined the employment impact of the minimum wage in a concentrated labor market, finding that under certain conditions, the minimum wage can actually *increase* employment. To quote:

We find that more concentrated labor markets - where wages are more likely to be below marginal productivity - experience significantly more positive employment effects from the minimum wage... minimum wage-induced employment changes become less negative as labor concentration increases, and are even estimated to be positive in the most highly concentrated markets. Our findings provide direct empirical evidence supporting the monopsony model as an explanation for the near-zero minimum wage employment effect documented in prior work.

Most recently, a 2021 [study](#) from Princeton University evaluated the impact of increased minimum wages on the fast-food industry, using McDonald's as a case study. Their results were as follows:

Higher minimum wages are not associated with faster adoption of touch-screen ordering, and there is near-full price pass-through of minimum wages, with little heterogeneity related to how binding minimum wage increases are for restaurants. Minimum wage hikes lead to increases in real wages (expressed in Big Macs an hour of Basic Crew work can buy) that are one fifth lower than the corresponding increases in nominal wages.

In other words, increased minimum wages are *not* correlated with faster automation, meaning that the next time you're forced to use a touch-screen kiosk at McDonald's, it won't be because of the minimum wage. Though minimum wage increases *did* lead to some small increase in prices, this was more than outweighed by the increased purchasing power enjoyed by workers, leading to a notable increase in their real incomes.

In general, the majority of economic research suggests that minimum wage increases have little-to-no negative employment effects, with any impacts that may exist concentrated in tradeable sectors. They also seem to lead to a notable increase in real incomes for low-wage workers. On that note, let's delve a little more into the impact of minimum wages on incomes and poverty.

Low-Wage Incomes and Poverty Reduction

Evidence indicates that increasing the minimum wage will lead to higher incomes for low-wage workers, as well as a notable reduction in poverty. A 1999 [study](#) in the *ILR Review* (published by Cornell University) examined the period from 1983-1996, finding "indications of a poverty-reducing effect of minimum wages among teenagers and older junior high school dropouts."

A 2019 [study](#) in the *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics* found that an increased minimum wage is associated with a sharp reduction in poverty, and a large increase in incomes. To quote:

There is robust evidence that higher minimum wages increase family incomes at the bottom of the distribution. The long-run (3 or more years) minimum wage elasticity of the non-elderly poverty rate with respect to the minimum wage ranges between -0.220 and -0.459 across alternative specifications.

A 2019 [article](#) from the American Economic Association (released to coincide with the aforementioned study) notes that "minimum wage laws significantly increased incomes for the poorest households." To quote:

Increasing the federal minimum wage from the current \$7.25 an hour to \$12 an hour would reduce the poverty rate by as much as 2 percentage points, according to Dube's estimates. Put differently, it would lift roughly 6 million Americans out of poverty. Overall, Dube's research indicates that minimum-wage policies are just as effective as other anti-poverty programs.

Similarly, a 2021 [study](#) in *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* examined the minimum wage expansion and increase that came along with the 1966 amendment to the Fair Labor Standards Act, finding that "earnings rose sharply for workers in the newly covered industries," with "no aggregate effect" on employment. The reform also helped to narrow the racial wealth gap. To quote:

The impact was nearly twice as large for black workers as for white workers. [...] The 1967 extension of the minimum wage can explain more than 20% of the reduction in the racial earnings and income gap during the civil rights era... minimum wage policy can play a critical role in reducing racial economic disparities.

Most recently, a 2021 [paper](#) from the NBER looked at the impact of minimum wage increases on labor market outcomes, saying:

In line with much of the existing evidence in the literature, we find that the minimum wage has a positive and significant impact on wages, while employment effects are modest in the U.S. context. We also show that the slight (statistically insignificant) employment increase comes from a slight drop in unemployment and a slight increase in the participation rate. These responses indicate that the minimum wage is unlikely to have a negative impact on workers by discouraging them to search for new jobs.

These effects seem to hold true when examining more specific sectors and demographics. For example, a 2019 [study](#) in the *American Journal of Public Health* examined the impact of minimum wage increases on female healthcare workers, with the following result:

Raising the minimum wage to \$15 per hour would reduce poverty rates among female health care workers by 27.1% to 50.3%.

Minimum wage laws seem to reduce wage inequality as well. A 2020 [study](#) from IZA examined wage inequality in Germany, finding that "the introduction of the minimum wage can account for about half of the recent decrease in wage inequality."

Interestingly, there is even increased support for a poverty-reducing effect of minimum wages in developing countries. One [study](#) from IZA found that "Raising the minimum wage reduces poverty in most developing countries," though the effect is somewhat modest, due to the large informal labor markets that often exist in these countries. Similarly, a 2021 [study](#) in the journal *World Development* found that "Increases in the minimum wage cause poverty and income inequality to decline in Brazil."

All-in-all, there is substantial evidence that increases in the minimum wage reduce poverty, increase overall incomes, and reduce wage inequality. They also play a critical role in reducing the racial economic gap.

Social Impacts of the Minimum Wage (Health, Crime, etc.)

There is extensive evidence that the minimum wage has a whole host of beneficial social effects. For example, a 2021 [study](#) in the journal *Preventative Medicine* found that "Each dollar of minimum wage may reduce infant deaths by 1.5–1.8% in metro counties." This becomes all the more striking when one considers that the United States has a [higher infant mortality rate than peer countries](#), even after adjusting for reporting differences.

Another 2021 [study](#), this one in the journal *Economics Letters*, found that "Increases in minimum wages are associated with a decline in teenage birth rates," while a 2018 [study](#) from the NBER found that a higher minimum wage reduces criminal recidivism.

A 2020 [study](#) in the *British Medical Journal* found that a higher minimum wage is associated with a notable decline in suicide rates, particularly among low-income workers:

Minimum wage increases appear to reduce the suicide rate among those with a high school education or less, and may reduce disparities between socioeconomic groups. Effects appear greatest during periods of high unemployment.

A 2018 [article](#) in the journal *Health Affairs* examined numerous recent studies on the matter, concluding that "the evidence suggests that increases in minimum wages improve health for low-wage or low-skilled continuously employed adults." Similarly, a 2021 [article](#) in the *JAMA Health Forum* examined the recent research, saying the following:

Some of the strongest existing research on health outcomes associated with wage increases hint at what could happen if the federal minimum wage were increased to \$15 per hour. Researchers have observed associations between increased wages and decreases in both suicide mortality and hypertension, better birth outcomes, and lower rates of sexually transmitted infections among women.

All-in-all, there is strong evidence that an increased minimum wage is associated with all manner of improved social outcomes, ranging from health, to crime, to suicide. Coupled with the aforementioned economic impacts, it seems quite clear that low-income and working-class people benefit strongly from increases in the minimum wage.

Prices and Inflation

Despite what you may have heard, there is little-to-no evidence that the minimum wage increases inflation. A 2004 [meta-analysis](#) from IZA found no evidence of significant increases in prices after minimum wage increases. Similarly, a 2020 [study](#) in the journal *Economics Letters* found that inflation *declined* after raising the minimum wage. This study is particularly useful, as it observes the effects of a very large increase (the minimum wage was doubled). To quote:

Analysis suggests that the minimum wage increase had little or no effect on prices. [...] Annual inflation decreased by 1.8 percentage points, suggesting that the minimum wage increase had a limited or even null effect on prices.

A [paper](#) from the Upjohn Institute corroborates these results, finding no evidence of inflation when the minimum wage was raised.

Conclusion

Having looked at the evidence, it seems apparent that minimum wage increases have little-to-no negative employment effects (with any impacts that do exist concentrated in tradeable sectors). In addition, they appear to have a strongly positive impact on real incomes, poverty reduction, public health, inequality, and a host of other outcomes. Raising the minimum wage is a not merely an extremely popular policy; it is also well-grounded in the evidence.

Sources

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- [British Journal of Industrial Relations | Publication Selection Bias in Minimum-Wage Research? A Meta-Regression Analysis](#)
- [American Economic Review | Time-Series Minimum-Wage Studies: A Meta-Analysis](#)
- [UC Berkeley Institute for Research on Labor and Employment | Minimum Wage Effects Across State Borders: Estimates Using Contiguous Counties](#)
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- [UCLA | Minimum Wage Employment Effects and Labor Market Concentration](#)
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Sources and Studies to Debunk Racism and "Race Realism"

Introduction

We are all aware of the massive problems with racism, fascism, and so-called "race realism" these days. In order to protect people from falling into this bigoted nonsense ("muh bell curve"), I figured it would be helpful to compile a list of high-quality sources for refuting racist myths and pseudo-science. As always, the sources are listed at the end.

"White People Are the Most Intelligent!"

Over the last few decades, numerous studies have been conducted debunking the idea that there is a genetic IQ gap between whites and non-whites. We will now go over some of them.

In 1959, German biologist Klaus Eyferth published a study in the journal *Vita Humana (Human Development)*, which studied the IQ of white and mixed-race children in post-war West Germany. The mothers were all white German women, while the fathers were white and black members of the US occupying forces. The mothers were matched for socio-economic status, and the children were tested for their IQ. The results were as follows:

Group	Boys	Girls	Difference
White	101	93	8
Mixed-Race	97	96	1
Difference	4	-3	

As is clearly observable, this study (which is commonly known as the "[Eyferth Study](#)") found no statistically significant difference between white and mixed-race children. The majority of researchers, including James Flynn (the researcher who discovered the Flynn Effect), Richard E. Nisbett, and Nathan Brody, feel that this study supports the conclusion that racial gaps in IQ are mostly or wholly environmental in origin. However, since many "race-realists" dismiss this study on the grounds that it only included men who had qualified for military service, we should look at a number of more recent studies on the matter, to make things clearer.

One useful [study](#) was published in the journal *Child Development* in 1972. This experiment studied black, white, and mixed-race children raised in British long-stay residential nurseries, subjecting them to three different tests of cognitive ability. Two out of three tests found "no significant difference" between the various groups, while one test found "significantly higher" scores for *non-whites*. One wonders whether the racists would accept this as evidence of black superiority (I think we know the answer).

Another important [study](#) was published in the journal *Developmental Psychology* in 1986. The author observed that black and interracial children raised by white parents had a significantly higher mean IQ score than age-matched children raised by black parents (117 vs 104), and argued that differences in early socialization explained this gap. Nisbett et. al's 2012 [review](#) found that these differences in socialization "were large enough to account for virtually the entire Black-White gap in IQ," lending more credence to the environmental argument.

Rushton and Jensen (two leading figures of scientific racism in the USA) attempted to dispute the 1986 study by arguing that the children were surveyed before adolescence, and therefore the results were unreliable; however, subsequent research (such as this [work](#) by Richard

Nisbett, published in 2009) found that there is virtually no gap in heritability between ages 7 and 17, and therefore, this argument falls apart.

An aforementioned 2012 [paper](#) by Richard Nisbett (co-authored with James Flynn and other leaders in the field), published in the *American Psychologist*, reviewed numerous studies conducted over the past decades, finding that the evidence "fails to support a genetic hypothesis." The authors instead argue for an environmental explanation of the racial IQ gap. In addition, a 2017 [study](#) in the *Journal of Intelligence* examined trans-racial adoptions, finding that "there is no consistent IQ difference between Black adoptees raised by Whites and White adoptees raised by Whites." This supports the "nil hypothesis" (i.e. "that adoptees of different races have similar IQs when raised in the same environment"), indicating that there is no genetic IQ gap between races.

In the book [IQ and Human Intelligence](#), Nicholas Mackintosh of Cambridge University surveyed various studies on the topic of race and IQ (including many of those previously mentioned), finding their results to be entirely compatible with a 100% environmental explanation of racial IQ gaps, with no significant evidence found for a genetic difference. Mackintosh's book also explores other common racist arguments, such as old "whites have larger brains" line. He explains that there is no evidence to support a difference in IQ based on brain sizes; for example, he points out that men and women have gaps in average brain size, without an observable difference in average IQ's. This is corroborated by other experts, such as Nisbett et. al's 2012 [review](#) of the research on the topic.

A [study](#) published in the journal *World Archaeology* in 2006 thoroughly debunks Rushton's claim that prehistoric whites were smarter than prehistoric blacks due to evolution. As it states: *Examination of the archaeological record does not support the claims made by these researchers [Rushton and his companions]. This suggests that regional differences in IQ test score results should not be ascribed to variations in human evolutionary development.*

In 2005, Nisbett published an [article](#) in the journal *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law*, directly responding to Rushton and Jensen. He rips apart their various claims, stating that they "ignore or misinterpret most of the evidence of greatest relevance to the question of heritability of the Black-White IQ gap." Nisbett analyzes the research on race and IQ, and concludes that "the evidence most relevant to the question indicates that the genetic contribution to the Black-White IQ gap is nil."

In short, decades of research have debunked the notion that whites and non-whites have a genetic difference in intelligence.

Racial Bias and the Criminal Justice System

There is significant evidence that the criminal justice system in the United States (including, but not limited to, the police and courts) are biased against black people. To begin with, black Americans are more likely to be killed by the police while unarmed than are white people. A 2016 [study](#) from the *American Journal of Preventative Medicine* found the following:

Black victims [of police shootings] were significantly more likely to be unarmed than white or Hispanic victims. Black victims were also significantly less likely than whites to have posed an immediate threat to [law enforcement].

A 2018 [study](#), published in the *American Journal of Public Health*, found the following: Police homicide risk is higher than suggested by official data. Black and Latino men are at higher risk for death than are White men, and these disparities vary markedly across place. Homicide reduction efforts should consider interventions to reduce the use of lethal force by police. Efforts to address unequal police violence should target places with high mortality risk. A 2020 [study](#) in the journal *Social Psychology and Personality Research*, which employed a "crime rate-correcting benchmark" (thus accounting for differences in crime rates), found "strong and statistically reliable anti-Black racial disparity in police killings of unarmed civilians." Black people are more likely to be arrested than whites for crimes which both commit at similar rates. For example, a [report](#) from the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) found that "Despite roughly equal usage rates, Blacks are 3.73 times more likely than whites to be arrested for marijuana."

Research has also found that non-whites receive harsher penalties than whites do for the same crimes. For example, a [report](#) from the United States Sentencing Commission found that blacks receive sentences which are, on average, 20% longer than whites for the same exact crime.

A 2011 [study](#) from the Sentencing Project has also found that only approx. 60% of the gap in racial imprisonment disparity can be explained by differing crime rates, meaning that approx. 40% is due to other factors, including racial bias.

"Non-Whites Commit More Crime Than Whites!"

Decades of research has found that, while there is a measured difference in crime rates among racial groups, this can be explained by socioeconomic factors, as well as discrimination in the criminal justice system. No compelling evidence has been found for a racial difference in crime rates when socioeconomic class is taken into account. [The Oxford Handbook of Ethnicity, Crime, and Immigration](#) summarizes these points quite well.

A [study](#) published in the journal *Social Forces* in 1996 examined Columbus, Ohio, concluding that "differences in structural disadvantage account for black-white differences in crime across

communities." In other words, the racial gap in crime rates can be explained by structural inequalities in material circumstances.

A [study](#) published in the journal *Criminology* in 2003 found that social and environmental differences accounted for the gap in crime rates among racial groups, not some inherent tendency among any race.

"Immigrants/Refugees Are Criminals!"

Research consistently finds that immigrants (both legal and undocumented) commit fewer crimes than native-born citizens. Even the right-wing Cato Institute has published multiple [reports](#) supporting this conclusion, as has the Sentencing Project.

The United States Census Bureau published a report confirming that native-born citizens are more likely to be convicted of a crime than immigrants (regardless of legal status). This was discussed in a 2015 [report](#) from the American Immigration Council.

The Cato Institute also published a [report](#) finding no evidence to support the claims that refugees are more likely to commit violent crime or terror attacks, noting that nobody (refugee or non-refugee) from the nations on the Trump travel ban list had ever been involved in a terror attack of any kind. Their research also concluded:

Zero Americans have been killed by Syrian refugees in a terrorist attack on U.S. soil. The annual chance of an American dying in a terrorist attack committed by a refugee is one in 3.6 billion.

In other words, the research shows that refugees and immigrants do *not* commit more crime than native-born citizens.

Conclusion

Racism and "race realism" are cancers, which have been given an undeserved chance to reemerge in recent years. As such, it is essential that we all be well-informed on these issues, so that we may fight back against racist nonsense. Study this information carefully, and be prepared to deploy it when necessary.

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- [American Psychologist | Intelligence: New Findings and Theoretical Developments](#)
- [Journal of Intelligence | Racial IQ Differences Among Transracial Adoptees: Fact or Artifact?](#)
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- [World Archaeology | Africanist Archaeology and Ancient IQ: Racial Science and Cultural Evolution in the Twenty-First Century](#)
- [Psychology, Public Policy, and Law | Heredity, environment, and race differences in IQ: A commentary on Rushton and Jensen](#)
- [American Journal of Preventative Medicine | Deaths Due to Use of Lethal Force by Law Enforcement: Findings From the National Violent Death Reporting System, 17 U.S. States, 2009–2012](#)
- [American Journal of Public Health | Risk of Police-Involved Death by Race/Ethnicity and Place, United States, 2012-2018](#)
- [Social Psychology and Personality Science | Racial Disparities in Police Use of Deadly Force Against Unarmed Individuals Persist After Appropriately Benchmarking Shooting Data on Violent Crime Rates](#)
- [American Civil Liberties Union \(ACLU\) | The War on Marijuana in Black and White](#)
- [United States Sentencing Commission | Demographic Differences in Sentencing](#)
- [Sentencing Project | Addressing Racial Disparities in Incarceration](#)
- [Oxford University | The Oxford Handbook of Ethnicity, Crime, and Immigration](#)
- [Social Forces | Extremely Disadvantaged Neighborhoods and Urban Crime](#)
- [Criminology | Explaining Racial and Ethnic Differences in Serious Adolescent Violent Behavior](#)
- [Cato Institute | Stiffening Immigration Enforcement Is Not the Answer to Reducing Crime](#)
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Refuting Myths About Transgender People

Introduction

Transphobia remains disturbingly common, and it is typically "justified" with various lies and slanders about trans people. In order to combat this bigotry, it is necessary to provide solid and easily understandable rebuttals to these common myths. All sources will be listed at the end of the post, if anyone would like to read in more depth.

Myth #1: "Trans People Are Mentally Ill!"

The notion that transgenderism is a mental illness has been explicitly rejected by virtually all major medical organizations. In 2021, the American Psychological Association issued a [resolution](#) in which they said the following:

Psychologists understand that gender is a nonbinary construct that allows for a range of gender identities and that a person's gender identity may not align with sex assigned at birth... diversity in gender identity and expression is part of the human experience and transgender and gender

nonbinary identities and expressions are healthy, incongruence between one's sex and gender is neither pathological nor a mental health disorder.

In addition, the World Health Organization [ceased](#) to classify transgenderism as a mental disorder in 2019, explicitly stating that it is "not actually a mental health condition."

Myth #2: "Trans People Are Dangerous!"

Perhaps the most common and pernicious myth spread about trans people is that they are somehow dangerous. This was the main line of argument behind the so-called "bathroom bills" in the United States, and it still sits at the root of much transphobic bigotry in countries like the US and UK. Trans women typically bare the brunt of this particular slander, with the claim being that they are supposedly just men lying about their gender identity in order to commit crimes.

The primary source for this claim is typically a study from the Swedish Karolinska Institute, which (supposedly) found that transgender women "retain male-pattern violence." This is (unsurprisingly) nonsense, and the lead author of the study (Dr. Cecilia Djehne) has denounced this interpretation of it. In an [interview](#) for *TransAdvocate*, Djehne stated that those "making claims about trans criminality, specifically rape likelihood, [are] misrepresenting the study's findings... we were certainly not saying that we found that trans women were a rape risk."

So, what exactly *was* the study saying? Well, while trans women studied from 1973 to 1988 *did* demonstrate a "male pattern of criminality," Djehne states that this pattern was *not* present in trans women studied from 1989 to 2003. She makes this quite clear in the interview, where she says "for the 1989 to 2003 group, we did not find a male pattern of criminality." She attributes this change over time to differences in trans healthcare and social stigma:

What the data tells us is that things are getting measurably better and the issues we found affecting the 1973 to 1988 cohort group likely reflects a time when trans health and psychological care was less effective and social stigma was far worse.

In other words, the study was demonstrating that when trans women are given access to proper gender-affirming treatment and reduced social stigma, they *don't* retain a "male pattern of criminality." Transphobes have literally flipped the study's findings upside-down, in an attempt to justify their irrational fear and hatred of transgender people. Keep this study tucked in the back of your mind, by the way; it comes up again later.

Clearly, there is no evidence whatsoever to support the idea that transgender people pose a violent crime risk; if anything, it is far more likely that they will be the *victims* of violence. Let's look at public restrooms again; according to a [report](#) from the UCLA School of Law, 68% of trans people reported experiencing at least one instance of verbal harassment in gender-segregated public restrooms, while 9% had been physically assaulted at least once in gendered bathrooms. Our priority should be protecting transgender people from bigoted harassment and violence, *not* "protecting" bigots from transgender people.

Myth #3: "Gender Affirming Treatment Doesn't Work!"

Another common claim made by transphobes is that gender-affirming treatment (hormones, surgery and the like) does not work, and may even *increase* the risk of suicide among people with dysphoria. The primary source for this claim is - you guessed it - the Karolinska study, which was cited as providing "the most illuminating results yet" by former Johns Hopkins psychiatrist (and religious anti-LGBT activist) Dr. Paul McHugh.

So, what does the Karolinska study *actually* say? Well, it *did* report that post-transition trans people had a higher suicide rate than the general population; however, it clearly states that "the results should not be interpreted such as sex reassignment per se increases morbidity and mortality. Things might have been even worse without sex reassignment." For further clarification, we can once again turn to lead author Cecilia Djehne's interview with *TransAdvocate*, where she says the following:

Medical transition alone won't resolve the effects of crushing social oppression: social anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress. What we've found is that treatment models which ignore the effect of cultural oppression and outright hate aren't enough. We need to understand that our treatment models must be responsive to not only gender dysphoria, but the effects of anti-trans hate as well. That's what improved care means... People who misuse the study always omit the fact that the study clearly states that it is not an evaluation of gender dysphoria treatment.

In other words, trans people who receive gender-affirming treatment continue to be a high risk for suicide due to *external social oppression*, not because the treatment doesn't work. Later in the interview, Djehne gives her *actual* view on gender-affirming treatment:

Of course trans medical and psychological care is efficacious... If we [look](#) at the [literature](#), we [find](#) that several recent [studies](#) conclude that WPATH Standards of Care compliant treatment decrease gender dysphoria and improves mental health.

The links contained in the above quote are to studies which demonstrate the positive impact of gender-affirming treatment, which we will now assess in more detail. However, before we dive in, it should be noted that some of these studies use the term "gender identity disorder" to

refer to dysphoria; this term is generally no longer used, as it is considered stigmatizing. With that said, let's get clinical.

First up, we have a 2014 [study](#) in the *Journal of Sexual Medicine*, which found that "A marked reduction in psychopathology occurs during the process of sex reassignment therapy, especially after the initiation of hormone therapy." That's rather self-explanatory, I think. Secondly, we've got a 2009 [paper](#) in the *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, which looked at a group of Swedish adults with gender dysphoria "after 5 or more years in the process [of transitioning] or 2 or more years after completed sex reassignment surgery." The researchers found that "almost all patients were satisfied with the sex reassignment; 86% were assessed by clinicians at follow-up as stable or improved in global functioning."

Next up, there's a 2010 [meta-analysis](#) from the Mayo Clinic, published in the journal *Clinical Endocrinology*, which looked at various studies discussing hormonal therapy and sex reassignment. The results were as follows:

Pooling across studies shows that after sex reassignment, 80% of individuals with GID reported significant improvement in gender dysphoria; 78% reported significant improvement in psychological symptoms; 80% reported significant improvement in quality of life; and 72% reported significant improvement in sexual function... sex reassignment that includes hormonal interventions in individuals with GID likely improves gender dysphoria, psychological functioning and comorbidities, sexual function and overall quality of life.

Moving on, we've got a 2015 [study](#) from the *Archives of Sexual Behavior*. According to the authors, the aim of this study was "to re-examine individuals with [gender dysphoria] after as long a period of time as possible. To meet the inclusion criterion, the legal recognition of participants' gender change via a legal name change had to date back at least 10 years." In other words, these were all people who had begun the process of changing their gender at least a decade prior to the study. The results were as follows:

[Participants'] overall evaluation of the treatment process for sex reassignment and its effectiveness in reducing gender dysphoria was positive. Regarding the results of the standardized questionnaires, participants showed significantly fewer psychological problems and interpersonal difficulties as well as a strongly increased life satisfaction at follow-up than at the time of the initial consultation.

In short, there is an enormous amount of evidence for the efficacy of gender-affirming treatment, and it should be made more widely available to those who need it. Treatment should also take into account the effects of social oppression, and work to resolve them.

Myth #4: "Many Trans People Regret Transitioning!"

This is another very common claim. Simply googling the phrase "trans regret" will result in an immediate deluge of articles from conservative news sites, claiming to have *hundreds* of stories by regretful trans people, who wish they had never transitioned.

In reality, such people are extraordinarily rare. A 2018 [study](#) in the *Journal of Sexual Medicine* reviewed all the patient files of a gender identity clinic in Amsterdam from the years 1972-2015. They found that "Only 0.6% of transwomen and 0.3% of transmen who underwent gonadectomy were identified as experiencing regret." This is an extremely small percentage, and when taken alongside the earlier cited studies on the efficacy of gender-affirming treatment, it indicates that the vast majority of trans people are satisfied with their transition. Of course, the Netherlands is a more progressive country than the United States or Britain, and so it could be the case that trans people in the latter two countries would experience a higher rate of regret due to harassment and social stigma. However, this would say nothing whatsoever about the efficacy of gender-affirming treatment; rather, it would be a comment on the damaging effects of transphobia.

Conclusion

The propaganda spread by transphobes has no basis in reality, and ought to be cast aside as the despicable crock of nonsense that it is. Transgender people are *not* dangerous, gender-affirming treatment *does* work, and most people do *not* regret transitioning. It's time we move past these damaging and bigoted notions, and create a society where all people can live freely.

Sources

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- [Clinical Endocrinology | Hormonal Therapy and Sex Reassignment: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of Quality of Life and Psychosocial Outcomes](#)
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Masterpost for Defending Socialism Against Anarchist Attacks, With Sources

"These gentlemen think that when they have changed the names of things they have changed the things themselves. This is how these profound thinkers mock at the whole world." - Friedrich Engels

- Introduction -

While the phrase "left unity" has come into great fashion lately, it seems that this has done little to stem the tide of anarchist assaults on everyone and everything having to do with Leninism. Everybody reading this will no doubt be able to recall at least one occasion on which they were smeared as a "tankie", "authoritarian", or (most insultingly of all) a "red fascist". This has left us with little choice but to respond, a task which we are often woefully unprepared for.

In the interests of protecting the legacy of socialism from these attacks, I have compiled this post addressing the various accusations and slanders put forth by our more utopian comrades.

Keep in mind that I am not attacking those anarchists who legitimately stand with Leninists and support socialist revolution; these anarchists are good comrades, even if we have theoretical differences. Rather, I am responding to those sectarian anarchists who, in the words of Michael Parenti, "support every revolution except the ones that succeed."

- "Leninist States Were Nothing But Horrible Dictatorships!" -

Perhaps the most common allegation put forth by the anarchists is this one, that the USSR, Red China, etc. were little more than brutal dictatorships, with no participation by the workers themselves. However, the truth of the matter is far more complex. While the Leninist states did commit excesses, they were far less extreme than is usually claimed, and there was a great deal more participation by workers than anarchists generally like to admit. Let us focus on the USSR as an example.

For one thing, the common claim that Soviet gulags were political prisons used to silence dissenters is, for the most part, untrue. An excellent study on this was conducted by J. Arch Getty (and others), and published in the *American Historical Review*, the most prestigious historical journal in the world:

- [American Historical Review | Victims of the Soviet Penal System in the Pre-War Years: A First Approach on the Basis of Archival Evidence](#)

In addition to pointing out that the total number of gulag prisoners was far lower than previously thought, the study also states that:

The frequent assertion that most of the camp [gulag] prisoners were 'political' also seems not to be true.

The study found that between 12% and 33% of camp prisoners were imprisoned for political offenses, with the rest convicted of legitimate crimes. This is corroborated by a CIA report on the topic, which found that as many as 95% of prisoners in the camps they investigated were non-political:

- [CIA \(Freedom of Information Act\) | Report on Soviet Gulags](#)

As for the issue of mass participation and political repression, research by Robert Thurston (Professor emeritus at Miami University at Ohio), published in the Cambridge University Press' *Slavic Review*, deals with this topic quite well:

- [Slavic Review \(Cambridge University Press\) | On Desk-Bound Parochialism, Commonsense Perspectives, and Lousy Evidence: A Response to Robert Conquest on the USSR](#)

Thurston remarks that:

Stalin, the press, and the Stakhanovite movement all regularly encouraged ordinary people to criticize those in authority.

He also points out that many arrests in the 1930's were actually late punishments for genuine offenses, such as serving in the White Army during the Civil War. Thurston also puts forth the question "If the citizenry was supposed to be terrorized and stop thinking, why encourage criticism and input from below on a large scale?" He also states that "my evidence suggests that widespread fear did not exist in the case at hand [the Soviet "Great Terror" period]." Thurston also wrote a good book on this topic, published by the Yale University Press:

- [Yale University Press | Life and Terror in Stalin's Russia, 1934-1941](#)

In it, Thurston states that:

Stalin did not intend to terrorize the country and did not need to rule by fear. Memoirs and interviews with Soviet people indicate that many more believed in Stalin's quest to eliminate internal enemies than were frightened by it.

The book also states that:

...between 1934 and 1936 police and court practice relaxed significantly. Then a series of events, together with the tense international situation and memories of real enemy activity during the savage Russian Civil War, combined to push leaders and people into a hysterical hunt for perceived 'wreckers.' After late 1938, however, the police and courts became dramatically milder.

One particular quote from Thurston demonstrates the entire point of this problem, and why we are hesitant to condemn the USSR for its excesses:

There was never a long period of Stalinism without a serious foreign threat, major internal dislocation, or both, which makes identifying its true nature impossible.

The genuine material conditions of the time (which anarchists consistently refuse to acknowledge) had an enormous impact on the functioning of these societies. The USSR, for example, dealt with sabotage, multiple invasions, constant infiltration and foreign threat, etc.

And despite it all, they *still* managed to include a great deal of mass participation, even if this did not extend as far as we would like.

- Analysis of the Anarchist Revolution in Spain -

If we are to take anarchist critiques seriously, then they must present us with a genuine alternative to the Leninist model. However, a practical analysis of anarchist revolution shows that they have no such alternative to offer. Their successes have largely been due the adoption of Leninist tactics, while their failures have resulted from their own unique features. For the sake of brevity, we will focus our analysis on Revolutionary Spain, the most famous of anarchist revolutions.

After the initial revolution, a system of courts were set up, which dispensed ruthless justice against fascist sympathizers and right-wingers. According to Juan Garcia Oliver, the Anarchist Minister of Justice (how's that for a phrase!):

Everybody created his own justice and administered it himself...Some used to call this 'taking a person for a ride' [paseo] but I maintain that it was justice administered directly by the people in the complete absence of the regular judicial bodies.

Diego Abad de Santillan, editor of *Solidaridad Obrera* (the official CNT newspaper), said the following:

We do not wish to deny that the nineteenth of July brought with it an overflowing of passions and abuses, a natural phenomenon of the transfer of power from the hands of privileged to the hands of the people. It is possible that our victory resulted in the death by violence of four or five thousand inhabitants of Catalonia who were listed as rightists and were linked to political or ecclesiastical reaction.

The anarchists even implemented a system of labor camps for fascist sympathizers. Juan Garcia Oliver remarked:

The weeds must be torn out by their roots. There cannot be and must not be pity for the enemies of the people, but... their rehabilitation through work, and that is precisely what the new ministerial order creating "work camps" seeks... great irrigation canals, roads, and public works must be built immediately.

The book *Workers Against Work: Labor in Paris and Barcelona During the Popular Fronts* (used as a source by Libcom, incidentally) is useful for discussing this topic:

- [University of California Press | Workers Against Work](#)

The book remarks:

The work camps were considered an integral part of the "constructive work of the Spanish Revolution," and many anarcho-syndicalists took pride in the "progressive" character of the reforms by the CNT minister of justice. The CNT recruited guards for the "concentration camps", as they were also called, from within its own ranks.

While the use of the term "concentration camps" is unfortunate (this was pre-Holocaust, remember), the use of a labor camp system hardly seems particularly anarchistic.

Now, let us discuss the economy. Our primary source for discussing the economy in Catalonia will be the book *The Spanish Civil War: Revolution and Counterrevolution* by Burnett Bolloten, which discussed the events from a pro-anarchist perspective:

- [University of North Carolina Press | The Spanish Civil War: Revolution and Counterrevolution](#)

After only a short time, the anarchists saw the need for organized economic planning, after completely decentralized self-management led to economic chaos. CNT member Albert Perez Bara commented:

After the first few days of euphoria, the workers returned to work and found themselves without responsible management. This resulted in the creation of workers' committees in factories, workshops and warehouses, which tried to resume production with all the problems that a transformation of this kind entailed. Owing to inadequate training and the sabotage of some of the technicians who remained many others had fled with the owners the workers' committees and other bodies that were improvised had to rely on the guidance of the unions.... Lacking training in economic matters, the union leaders, with more good will than success, began to issue directives that spread confusion in the factory committees and enormous chaos in production. This was aggravated by the fact that each union... gave different and often contradictory instruction.

This resulted in the CNT approving the decree on "Collectivization and Workers' Control" on October 24, 1936. This decree required *all* firms with more than 100 workers to be collectivized (firms with less than 100 workers could collectivize if the workers agreed to it), and ordered them to join industrial councils, which were represented in the Economic Council of Catalonia, which would plan out the economy. In other words, the CNT introduced a form of central economic planning. While this system differed from the nationalization implemented by the USSR and other Leninist states, it was still quite different from the abstract "workplace democracy" espoused by many anarchists today.

After a short time, the unions (led by the CNT) began to deliberately restructure the economy, closing down hundreds of smaller plants, and refocusing their workers and capital towards larger, better-equipped ones. In Catalonia alone, more than seventy foundries were closed by the CNT, and production was focused on twenty-four larger foundries. In Barcelona, 905 smaller beauty shops and barbershops were closed down, their equipment and workers being focused on 212 larger shops.

Bolletan notes that, while some joined voluntarily the communes, others, especially in the beginning of the revolution, were forced to join the collectives by anarchist militias. The CNT newspaper *Solidaridad Obrera* reported that: "Certain abuses have been committed that we consider counterproductive. We know that certain irresponsible elements have frightened the small peasants and that up to now a certain apathy has been noted in their daily labors." This form of economic planning (and the sometimes harsh measures by which it was established) resulted in remarkable (if short-lived) success. As Eddie Conlon wrote in a publication discussing agriculture for the Workers' Solidarity Movement:

Production greatly increased. Technicians and agronomists helped the peasants to make better use of the land. Modern scientific methods were introduced and in some areas yields increased by as much as 50%. There was enough to feed the collectivists and the militias in their areas. Often there was enough for exchange with other collectives in the cities for machinery. In addition food was handed over to the supply committees who looked after distribution in the urban areas.

From all of this, it is clear that the CNT were not nearly as different from the Bolsheviks as they generally liked to claim. They implemented a court system, used labor camps for fascist sympathizers, introduced economic planning, forcibly collectivized industries, and used their planning committees to restructure the economy, closing down enterprises and refocusing labor and capital in accordance with the general needs of the people. While all of this is commendable, it is also virtually indistinguishable from the activities of Leninist revolutionaries.

- Achievements of Leninist Socialism -

What anarchists also typically fail to mention when discussing Leninist socialism are the massive gains in quality of life attained by the socialist states. Let us go into this topic in more detail.

General Achievements

According to a study conducted using World Bank data, socialist (Leninist) countries had a higher quality of life than capitalist countries when controlling for level of economic

development. Quality of life was measured using criteria such as life expectancy, literacy, daily calorie consumption per capita, access to higher education, housing, etc. The study states that: Our findings indicate that countries with socialist political-economic systems can make great strides toward meeting basic human needs, even without extensive economic resources. When much of the world's population suffers from disease, early death, malnutrition, and illiteracy, these observations take on a meaning that goes beyond cold statistics.

- [American Journal of Public Health | Economic Development, Political-Economic System, and the Physical Quality of Life](#)

According to a study by Vicente Navarro, Professor of Health and Public Policy at Johns Hopkins University:

...contrary to dominant ideology, socialism and socialist forces have been, for the most part, better able to improve health conditions than have capitalism and capitalist forces... the evidence presented in this article shows that the historical experience of socialism has not been one of failure. To the contrary: it has been, for the most part, more successful than capitalism in improving the health conditions of the world's populations.

- [International Journal of Health Services | Has Socialism Failed? An Analysis of Health Indicators Under Socialism](#)

Now, let us discuss some particular countries.

Maoist China

Perhaps the best source on this topic is *Perspectives on the Human and Economic Development of India and China*, by Amartya Sen (Professor of Economics at Harvard University, and Chair of Trinity College at Cambridge). Sen won the Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences for his work on famine and development economics, particularly his study of India and China:

- [Harvard University | Perspectives on the Economic and Human Development of India and China](#)

According to Sen, Maoist China made enormous strides in increasing quality of life: Because of its radical commitment to the elimination of poverty and to improving living conditions - a commitment in which Maoist as well as Marxist ideas and ideals played an important part - China did achieve many things that the Indian leadership failed to press for and pursue with any vigor. The elimination of widespread hunger, illiteracy, and ill health falls solidly in this category. When state action operates in the right direction, the results can be

quite remarkable, as is illustrated by the social achievements of the pre-reform [Maoist] period.

According to Sen, in Maoist China a "remarkable reduction in undernourishment took place," achieved via socialist policies:

The casual processes through which the reduction of undernourishment was achieved involved extensive state action including redistributive policies, nutritional support, and of course health care (since undernourishment is frequently caused by parasitic diseases and other illnesses).

On the issue of education, Sen notes that the huge improvements (including dramatic increases in literacy) can be attributed primary to the pre-reform Maoist period:

China's breakthrough in the field of elementary education had already taken place before the process of economic reform was initiated at the end of the seventies. Census data indicate, for instance, that literacy rates in 1982 for the 15-19 age group were already as high as 96 percent for males and 85 percent for females.

China also massively improved healthcare during the Maoist period:

China's achievements in the field of health during the pre-reform period include a dramatic reduction of infant and child mortality and a remarkable expansion of longevity.

A study from Stanford University and the National Bureau of Economic Research supports these claims:

- [Population Studies | An Exploration of China's Mortality Decline Under Mao: A Provincial Analysis, 1950-1980](#)

The study states that:

China's growth in life expectancy at birth from 35–40 years in 1949 to 65.5 years in 1980 is among the most rapid sustained increases in documented global history.

It also points out the massive increases in the health system:

Physician and hospital supply grew dramatically under Mao due to a variety of factors (including increases in government financing, the introduction of social insurance for urban public employees, and the launch of China's Rural Cooperative Medical System in the mid-1950's). Rural Cooperative Medical Schemes (CMS) were vigorously promoted and became widespread in the late 1960's as part of the Cultural Revolution.

The study confirms Sen's analysis of education:

China made large strides in primary and secondary education under Mao.

It also quotes other research which found that the rapid gains in Chinese healthcare can be attributed to the specific socialist policies implemented:

China's mortality decline between 1953 and 1957, which resembles that of the US between 1900 and 1930, was "primarily due to the unique social organisation of Chinese public health practices."

There were also extremely successful mass vaccination campaigns:

Systematic efforts to vaccinate the population against polio, measles, diphtheria, whooping cough, scarlet fever, and cholera were rapid and reputedly successful (China nearly eradicated smallpox within the span of only three years, with the last documented cases occurring in Tibet and Yunnan in 1960).

Also, while the Great Chinese Famine (during the Great Leap Forward) was devastating, starvation in capitalist India during this same period killed over 100 million people, *vastly* surpassing the Chinese famine. This is discussed in another book by Amartya Sen:

...it is important to note that despite the gigantic size of excess mortality in the Chinese famine, the extra mortality in India from regular deprivation in normal times vastly overshadows the former. Comparing India's death rate of 12 per thousand with China's of 7 per thousand, and applying that difference to the Indian population of 781 million in 1986, we get an estimate of excess normal mortality in India of 3.9 million per year. This implies that every eight years or so more people die in India because of its higher regular death rate than died in China in the gigantic famine of 1958 – 61. India seems to manage to fill its cupboard with more skeletons every eight years than China put there in its years of shame.

- [Harvard University | Hunger and Public Action](#)

USSR

As for the USSR, Robert C. Allen, Professor of Economic History at Oxford, states that "the Soviet economy performed well", remarking that it achieved "high rates of capital accumulation, rapid GDP growth, and rising per capita consumption even in the 1930's," and that "recent research shows that the standard of living also increased briskly." Also states that

"This success would not have occurred without the 1917 revolution or the planned development of state owned industry."

- [University of Oxford | A Reassessment of the Soviet Industrial Revolution](#)
 - [Princeton University Press | Farm to Factory: A Reinterpretation of the Soviet Industrial Revolution](#)

Researchers from Williams College performed a detailed analysis of living standards in the USSR, which found that the Soviet Union achieved "Remarkably large and rapid improvements in child height, adult stature and infant mortality," using this data to state that "significant improvements likely occurred in the nutrition, sanitary practices, and public health infrastructure." Also states that "the physical growth record of the Soviet population compares favorably with that of other European countries at a similar level of development in this period." Finally, states that:

The conventional measures of GNP growth and household consumption indicate a long, uninterrupted upward climb in the Soviet standard of living from 1928 to 1985; even Western estimates of these measures support this view, albeit at a slower rate of growth than the Soviet measures.

- [Williams College | Reassessing the Standard of Living in the Soviet Union: An Analysis Using Archival and Anthropometric Data](#)

Cuba

According to the United Nations, Cuba is "at the forefront of developing nations" in terms of quality of life. It has a higher life expectancy and literacy rate than the USA, as well as one of the lowest rates of malnutrition in the world. It is also the first nation in the world to eliminate mother-to-child HIV and syphilis transmission, a remarkable healthcare achievement. The sources for these claims are as follows:

- [Oxfam America | Cuba: Social Policy at the Crossroads](#)
- [UNICEF | Cuba Has Better Literacy Rate, Life Expectancy, and Prenatal Care than the United States](#)
- [World Food Program USA \(United Nations\) | Cuba Has "Largely Eliminated Hunger and Poverty"](#)
- [Food and Agricultural Organization \(United Nations\) | Report on Nutrition in Cuba](#)
- [World Health Organization \(United Nations\) | Cuba First Country in the World to Eliminate Mother-to-Child HIV Transmissions](#)

Analysis

All of these enormous achievements show conclusively that socialism, as implemented in the 20th century, was able to vastly improve life for over a billion people. This does not even address nations such as Burkina Faso under Thomas Sankara, which made enormous improvements in nutrition, healthcare, and development. It is impossible to imagine how simply implementing "workers' self-management" would have achieved these things, especially when even the CNT used economic planning (as shown above).

- Conclusion -

From all that has been discussed above, it is clear that Leninist socialism has achieved a great deal more than anarchism can claim, and has been the victim of a near-constant stream of slanders, even from those who are supposed to be our comrades.

While we should not cut ourselves off entirely from interacting with our anarchist friends, it is important that we always be ready to defend 20th century socialism, while acknowledging its genuine flaws, so that we may advance, and make use of the effective tactics of revolutionaries before us.

Refuting "The Nazis Were Socialists" With Academic Sources

Introduction

Hello everyone. There's been an upsurge in reactionary nonsense lately, with people making false claims intended to either excuse the horrific actions of fascist regimes, or slander socialist ones by association. As such, I figured it would be useful to provide some quick refutations of these myths.

"The Nazis Were Socialists!"

The Nazis favored privatization and opposed socialist economics in every way they could. According to a [study](#) published in *The Journal of Economic History* (published by the Cambridge University Press):

Irrespective of a quite bad overall performance, an important characteristic of the economy of the Third Reich, and a big difference from a centrally planned one, was the role private ownership of firms was playing - in practice as well as in theory. The ideal Nazi economy would liberate the

creativity of a multitude of private entrepreneurs in a predominantly competitive framework gently directed by the state to achieve the highest welfare of the Germanic people.

The Nazis despised nationalization, and instead pushed for intense privatization whenever they got the chance:

Available sources make perfectly clear that the Nazi regime did not want at all a German economy with public ownership of many or all enterprises. Therefore it generally had no intention whatsoever of nationalizing private firms or creating state firms. On the contrary the reprivatization of enterprises was furthered wherever possible.

On the rare occasions when they were forced to make use of state-owned factories, they included a contract option allowing private owners to purchase it. In addition, they avoided the creation of state-owned enterprises whenever possible, favoring private investment: State-owned plants were to be avoided wherever possible. Nevertheless, sometimes they were necessary when private industry was not prepared to realize a war-related investment on its own. In these cases, the Reich often insisted on the inclusion in the contract of an option clause according to which the private firm operating the plant was entitled to purchase it. Even the establishment of *Reichswerke Hermann Goering* in 1937 is no contradiction to the rule that the Reich principally did not want public ownership of enterprises. The Reich in fact tried hard to win the German industry over to engage in the project.

These findings are backed up by another [study](#), this one from the University of Barcelona. According to this paper, not only did the Nazis favor privatization, they did so in a time when other capitalist governments were generally *expanding* public ownership, nationalizing various industries, etc. Nazi privatization was actually "against the mainstream," as they call it: The Nazi regime transferred public ownership and public services to the private sector. In doing so, they went against the mainstream trends in the Western capitalist countries, none of which systematically reprivatized firms during the 1930s. Privatization in Nazi Germany was also unique in transferring to private hands the delivery of public services previously provided by government. The firms and the services transferred to private ownership belonged to diverse sectors.

In short, *no, the Nazis were not socialists*. Now, let's quickly refute another myth.

"The Nazis Saved the German Economy!"

This is a favorite of fascist apologists everywhere. However, in reality, the Nazi economy was a tremendous failure, and led to enormous reductions in living standards for the German people. According to a [study](#) published in the journal *Economics and Human Biology*:

The results imply that Germany experienced a substantial increase in mortality rates in most age groups in the mid-1930s, even relative to those of 1932, the worst year of the Great Depression. Moreover, children's heights - an indicator of the quality of nutrition and health - were generally stagnating between 1933 and 1938, but had increased significantly during the 1920s. Persecution, by itself, does not explain such an adverse development in biological welfare; the non-persecuted segments of the German population were affected as well.

These problems were the direct result of Nazi economic policy:

The reason for this adverse development was caused by the fact that military expenditures increased at the expense of public health measures. In addition, food imports were curtailed, and prices of many agricultural products were controlled. There is ample evidence that this set of economic policies had an adverse effect on the health and nutritional status of the population.

I hope this clears this issue up.

Conclusion

I hope you comrades find these sources helpful. Be sure to cite them properly when debating with liberals and reactionaries; the worst thing we can do for our cause is defend it poorly. Stay informed comrades.

Sources

- [Journal of Economic History | The Role of Private Property in the Nazi Economy: The Case of Industry](#)
- [University of Barcelona | Against the Mainstream: Nazi Privatization in 1930s Germany](#)
- [Economics and Human Biology | Autarchy, Market Disintegration, and Health: The Mortality and Nutritional Crisis in Nazi Germany, 1933-1937](#)

Polls of People in Socialist and Ex-Socialist Countries

Socialists are often told to "ask those who lived under socialism." Fortunately, we don't have to, as numerous international surveys have been conducted on the matter. Polls indicate that a majority of Eastern Europeans feel that life was better (or, at the very least, no worse) under socialism:

Nation	Population	Percent Favoring Life Under Socialism	Number Favoring Life Under Socialism
Russia	144,438,554	75%	95,329,446
Ukraine	42,386,403	72%	30,518,210
Belarus	9,491,800	38%	3,606,884
Moldova	2,681,735	42%	1,126,328
Azerbaijan	9,981,457	31%	3,094,252

Nation	Population	Percent Favoring Life Under Socialism	Number Favoring Life Under Socialism
Georgia	3,729,600	33%	1,230,768
Armenia	3,046,100	66%	2,010,426
Kazakhstan	18,195,900	25%	4,548,975
Tajikistan	9,420,175	52%	4,898,491
Kyrgyzstan	6,389,500	61%	3,897,595
Turkmenistan	5,983,043	8%	478,643
Lithuania	2,742,221	70%	822,666
Bulgaria	7,000,039	68%	4,760,027
Serbia	7,020,858	81%	5,686,895
Romania	20,121,641	69%	13,883,932
Hungary	9,798,000	45%	4,409,100
Eastern Germany	13,600,000	25%	3,400,000
Poland	37,868,701	19%	7,195,053
Czech Republic	10,698,355	22%	2,353,638
Slovakia	5,458,230	39%	2,128,710
Total	370,052,312	56%	208,379,509

In addition, those who actually [lived under communism have a more negative view of capitalism](#), and a strong majority of people *across all countries surveyed* continue to say that [ordinary people did not benefit from the transition to capitalism](#).

The same is true of Cuba. International [polls](#) (taken without the approval of the Cuban government) have found that Cubans are more satisfied with their system than Americans are with ours (this goes doubly for their healthcare and education systems).

According to a [survey](#) from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, Albanians feel that "during Communism, the country was safer, had better education, more jobs, better work safety, and better political stability, less corruption and more equality in terms of living standards. Respondents were almost equally divided about whether life was more comfortable under Communism (49%) or whether it was less comfortable during that period (48%)." That being said, a majority of Albanians did say that the post-communist period is, on the whole, better than the communist era (due in large part to increased civil liberties and less international isolation leading to a better economy). A majority also continue to describe communism as a "good idea," though they are divided over whether it was well-implemented by Hoxha.

NOTE: For all countries, the data used is the most recent available. For instance, Russia is mentioned in the Pew Research survey, but the *Moscow Times* source (citing Levada Poll) is used instead, as it is more recent.

Sources

- [The Moscow Times | 75% of Russians Say Soviet Era Was the Greatest Time in Their Country's History](#)
- [Pew Research Center | Political and Economic Changes Since the Fall of Communism](#)
- [Gallup Poll | Former Soviet Countries See More Harm Than Good From Breakup](#)
- [Balkan Insight | Serbia Poll: 81% Say Life Was Better "During the Time of Socialism"](#)
- [El Mundo | Majority of Romanians Say They Lived Better Under Communism](#)
- [Pew Research Center | People Who Lived Under Communism Have a More Negative View of Capitalism](#)
- [Pew Research Center | Did Ordinary People Benefit From the Transition to Capitalism?](#)
- [The New Republic | Polls Shows Cubans Are More Politically Satisfied Than Americans](#)
- [Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe | Survey on Albanian Communist Period](#)

The Labor Theory of Value: An Examination

Introduction

The precise nature of Marx's theory of value has long been a topic of debate amongst Marxists. The questions of whether Marx held a labor theory of value, and if he did, whether such a theory is valid, are of key importance to our general understanding of Marxist political economy. As such, it is worth delving into the alternative perspectives on this issue, laying out the various arguments of both sides. As always, all sources will be listed at the end.

Empirical Support for the Labor Theory of Value

Since the emergence of Marxism in the 19th century, the majority of Marxists have adhered to the labor theory of value. While mainstream economists generally dismiss the LTV as outdated and irrelevant, its proponents argue that it has been supported by recent empirical evidence. To quote a recent [paper](#) from the New School for Social Research:

The alleged refutation of the labour theory of value was an integral part of the marginalist attack against Classical and Marxist analysis. However, statistical analysis of price-value relationships made possible by the data available since the later 20th century suggest considerable empirical strength of the labour theory of value.

Some of the earliest empirical work on this topic comes from a 1984 [publication](#) by the economist Anwar Shaikh, in which he argued that “for both prices of production and market prices, roughly 93% of both cross-sectional and inter-temporal variations in these prices can be explained by the corresponding variations in [labor] values.” A 1997 [publication](#) by Shaikh develops this argument further, with additional reference to the empirical evidence. To quote: Across input-output years we found that on average labour values deviate from market prices by only 9.2 percent, and that prices of production (calculated at observed rates of profit) deviate from market prices by only 8.2 per cent.

Following on from Shaikh’s initial work, a 1987 [paper](#) in the *Cambridge Journal of Economics* examined the deviations between labor-value ratios and production prices, coming to the conclusion that “relative production prices are mainly determined by labour-value ratios.” The author goes on to say the following:

The aggregate effects of the deviations between production prices and labour-value ratios are small, so one can accept as empirically valid Marx’s proposition that the sum of profits is equal to total surplus value.

A 1989 [paper](#) in the *Cambridge Journal of Economics* looked at data from the United States, finding that “labor-values and prices of production for the US economy in the post World War II period were remarkably close to each other as well as to market prices.” The author continues:

While the presence of heterogeneous capital goods and fixed proportions dealt fatal blows to the neoclassical concept of aggregate physical capital, the near-linearity of actual wage-profit curves appears to support the labour theory of value as a powerful practical tool to analyze and understand the global character of production and growth in capitalist economies.

In a 1997 [paper](#), published in the *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, economists Paul Cockshott and Allin Cottrell provided what they claimed was “empirical support for the ‘law of value’, understood as the proposition that embodied labour time is conserved in exchanges of commodities.” As they put it:

Market prices are well correlated with the sum of direct and indirect labour content. Is it possible to produce equally good correlations by taking the sum of direct and indirect x-content, where x is some input other than labour time? We repeat the analysis for electricity, iron and steel, and oil and

show that the answer is no. The high correlations in the case of labour time are, therefore, not a statistical artifact.

A 2002 [paper](#) in the *Cambridge Journal of Economics* examined labor-time and market price in the Greek economy, finding more evidence to support the empirical value of the LTV. As the study says:

Our results on the closeness of values and prices as measured by their absolute deviation and correlation, the shape of the wage-profit curves, the predictive power of labour values over market prices compared with other 'value bases', and the comparison of fundamental Marxian categories when estimated in value and price terms provide further support for the empirical strength of the labour theory of value.

A 2006 [paper](#), published in the *Indian Development Review*, examined data from eighteen countries, between 1968 and 2000, arguing that the data supports the empirical connection between labor-time and market price. To quote:

The results are broadly consistent; labour values and production prices of industry outputs are highly correlated with its market price. The predictive power is compared to alternative value bases. Furthermore, the empirical support for profit rate equalization, as assumed by the theory of production prices, is weak.

A 2006 [paper](#) in the *Seoul Journal of Economics* extended this analysis to the Korean economy, arguing that “the Korean economy displays similarities with a number of other economies as regards to the proximity of labor values.” The authors continue:

This result lends additional support to the labor theory of value as an analytical tool for the understanding of the laws of motion of modern economies.

A 2013 [paper](#) from the *Cambridge Journal of Economics* examined data from the German economy, finding that the evidence “confirms the main results of previous studies concerning labour values and market prices.” The author argues that this provides support for the general Marxist view of exploitation. To quote:

[A]lthough most contemporary authors deny the relevance of labour values for explaining prices, there are good reasons to argue that the law of value is correct in a stochastic sense. Without going into detail, this implies that the famous Marxian invariant postulates are justifiable in a similar way. Profit, therefore, should not be related to the marginal product of capital, but to exploited labour.

A 2020 [paper](#) in the *Review of Radical Political Economics* extends this analysis to the Chinese economy, finding that “price theory based on either the Marxian or classical tradition can largely explain observed market prices in the productive capitalist sectors in China.”

In addition, the aforementioned 2020 [paper](#) from the New School for Social Research provides “the most comprehensive empirical application of its class and [generalizes] the results that have been established in the relevant literature.” To quote:

The analysis of a large dataset of 42 countries and 15 years reveal only small and stable deviations and thus lend support to the Classical Political Economic analysis.

Having examined the empirical evidence for the labor theory of value, we should now look at some of the relevant critiques, as well as alternative Marxian perspectives on the issue.

Criticisms of LTV Studies (With Responses)

French economists Jonathan Nitzan and Shimshon Bichler [critiqued](#) Cockshott and Cottrell's work on the LTV, arguing that they had merely correlated two monetary values, rather than examining abstract labor-time as such. They also argued that the correlation between labor-time and market price is spurious, based on a misuse of regression analysis. Cockshott and Cottrell replied to these arguments in a 2014 [paper](#), in which they argue that "sectoral wage bills give a reasonable proxy for Marx's socially necessary labour time... labour-time figures are available for some countries and have been used in the literature, while it is also possible to back out labour-time data from wage bills given average wage-rate data by industry." They also argue that Nitzan and Bichler are wrong to claim that the correlation between labor-time and market price is merely spurious, providing a critique of the statistical analysis used to reach this conclusion:

The supposedly correct correlation is in fact invalid, breaking the rules of dimensional analysis, while a good deal of ancillary evidence supports the validity of the finding of a close relationship between prices and values —a finding which can also be expressed without recourse to correlation. Interesting open questions remain regarding the price-value relationship, but whether it's a case of spurious correlation is not one of them.

Another criticism of Cockshott and Cottrell's work was put forth by fellow Marxist Andrew Kliman. In a 2002 [paper](#) in the *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, Kliman states that "after controlling for variations in industry size that produce 'spurious correlation', I find no reliable evidence that relative values have any influence upon relative prices." He continues: Values turn out to be no better predictors of prices than any other random variable with the same probability distribution.

Cockshott and Cottrell responded in a 2005 [paper](#), also in the *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, in which they argued that Kliman's "statistical correction techniques involve dividing through by the signal to leave the noise." As they say:

Kliman's simulation results—which appear to be damaging to the idea of a substantial correlation of price and value across industries—can be replicated and explained within our framework. The correlation in question disappears under Kliman's scaling or deflation of price and value, because he is in effect 'dividing through by the data', industry cost figures being, in practice, the source data for the calculation of industry values.

For those who are interested, a further reply by Kliman may be found [here](#). In contrast to both his work, and that of Cockshott and Cottrell, a 2005 [paper](#) in the *Journal of Post-Keynesian Economics* argues that the entire argument is impossible to judge, due to the difficulty of empirically testing the correlation between labor value and market price. The authors note that "Kliman's results are in sharp contrast with those of the whole literature on empirical tests of the labor theory of value." However, they go on to state that "all empirical measures of the price-value correlation - and therefore all the statistical results derived from such measures, including Kliman's - are meaningless."

I will leave it to the reader to decide who won the aforementioned debates; either way, it is important that all Marxists take account of both sides of the issue, so that whatever our opinion, we are well-versed in the empirical evidence, as well as the relevant theoretical considerations.

The Transformation Problem: Some Potential Solutions

One of the major debates surrounding the labor theory of value is the so-called "transformation problem," which is the question of how labor values "transform" into the competitive prices of the market. Over the years, Marxist economists have put forth a variety of potential solutions to this problem, some of which will be discussed here.

A 2018 [paper](#) in the *Cambridge Journal of Economics* argues that "the transformation problem dissolves once we consider the vertically integrated subsystems induced by the specific institutional setup of a capitalist economy." The author goes on to state that "production prices, both in steady-state and non-uniform-growth models, are proportional to the physical quantities of labour supplied to 'vertically super-integrated subsystems'. In consequence the labour theory of value, suitably generalized, also applies at the institutional stage of analysis." A 2020 [paper](#), also in the *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, offers a critique of Anwar Shaikh's interpretation, which argues that total profit is not equal to total surplus value. Rather, the author of this paper argues in favor of a "'macro-monetary' interpretation of Marx's theory

according to which there is no transformation problem in Marx's theory and total profit is always equal to total surplus-value."

In a 1988 [paper](#), published in the journal *Capital and Class*, Andrew Kliman and Ted McGlone argue in favor of Marx's original solution to the transformation problem, put forth in *Capital, Volume III*. As they put it, "there is nothing wrong with Marx's approach once it is construed as an exercise in dialectics rather than some attempt to map mathematically values on to prices. Consequently, much of the debate over values and the transformation of values has been wrongly directed at matters of mathematical technique when the real issue concerns one of method."

Finally, a 2017 [paper](#) in the *Journal of Economic Surveys* reviews some of the recent literature on the transformation problem, arguing that "there are various theoretically relevant and logically consistent alternative interpretations based on different assumptions and definitions."

The Analytical Marxist Perspective

Sidestepping the debate over whether the LTV is valid, some Marxists (particularly those from the Analytic school) have taken the position that it is simply irrelevant to the overall Marxist critique of capitalism. In a 1979 [paper](#) in the journal *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, G.A. Cohen argues that "the relationship between the labour theory of value and the concept of exploitation is one of mutual irrelevance." To quote:

The labour theory of value is not a suitable basis for the charge of exploitation laid against capitalism by Marxists, and the real foundation of that charge is something much simpler which, for reasons to be stated, is widely confused with the labour theory of value.

Similarly, the Marxist economist John Roemer has argued that the LTV is the wrong basis for the Marxian critique, arguing instead for a view based on property relations. He has put this view forth in many papers, such as [this one](#), published in the journal *Philosophy and Public Affairs* in 1983.

Conclusion

I hope that this post has given a useful overview of the value debate. The labor theory of value, its validity, and its use as a foundation for the claim of exploitation, are all critically important topics for all Marxists to consider; hopefully the evidence discussed here may provide a basis for further examination by the reader.

Sources

- [New School for Social Research | Price-Value Deviations and the Labor Theory of Value. Evidence from 42 Countries, 2000-2017](#)
- ["The Transformation from Marx to Sraffa" by Anwar Shaikh](#)
- ["The Empirical Strength of the Labour Theory of Value" by Anwar Shaikh](#)
- [Cambridge Journal of Economics | The Deviation of Production Prices from Labour Values: Some Methodology and Empirical Evidence](#)
- [Cambridge Journal of Economics | Values, Prices, and Wage-Profit Curves in the US Economy](#)
- [Cambridge Journal of Economics | Labour Time Versus Alternative Value Bases: A Research Note](#)
- [Cambridge Journal of Economics | Values, Prices of Production and Market Prices: Some More Evidence from the Greek Economy](#)
- [Indian Development Review | Labour Value and Equalization of Profit Rates: A Multi-Country Study](#)
- [Seoul Journal of Economics | Labor Values, Prices of Production, and Wage-Profit Rate Frontiers of the Korean Economy](#)
- [Cambridge Journal of Economics | Labour Values, Prices of Production and the Missing Equalisation Tendency of Profit Rates: Evidence from the German Economy](#)
- [Review of Radical Political Economics | Do Labor Values Explain Chinese Prices? Evidence from China's Input-Output Tables, 1990-2012](#)
- [Testing the Labour Theory of Value: An Exchange \(Cockshott, Bichler, and Nitzan\)](#)
- ["The Empirics of the Labour Theory of Value: Reply to Nitzan and Bichler" by Cockshott, Cottrell, and Valle Baeza](#)
- [Cambridge Journal of Economics | Law of Value and Law of Statistics: Sectoral Values and Prices in the US Economy, 1977-97](#)
- [Cambridge Journal of Economics | Robust Correlations Between Prices and Labour-Values: A Comment](#)
- [Cambridge Journal of Economics | Reply to Cockshott and Cottrell](#)
- [Journal of Post-Keynesian Economics | Can We Trust in Cross-Sectional Price-Value Correlation Measures? Some Evidence from the Case of Spain](#)
- [Cambridge Journal of Economics | Marx's Transformation Problem and Pasinetti's Vertically Integrated Subsystems](#)
- [Cambridge Journal of Economics | A Critique of Shaikh's Two Interpretations of Marx's 'Transformation Problem'](#)
- [Capital and Class | The Transformation Non-Problem and the Non-Transformation Problem](#)
- [Journal of Economic Surveys | Value, Price, and Exploitation: The Logic of the Transformation Problem](#)

- [Philosophy and Public Affairs | The Labour Theory of Value and the Concept of Exploitation](#)
- [Philosophy and Public Affairs | R. P. Wolff's Reinterpretation of Marx's Labor Theory of Value: Comment](#)

Essays on Socialism in Eastern Europe

The Soviet Union: An Honest Appraisal For the 21st Century

"Let time be the judge. Time is just, but only in the long term—not in the short term. The time we won't live to see, which will be free of our prejudices." - Secondhand Time: An Oral History of the Fall of the Soviet Union, by Svetlana Alexievich

Introduction

Thirty years after it passed into history, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (better known as the Soviet Union) continues to arouse the passions of left and right alike. As the world's first socialist state, it occupies an enormous place in the collective memory of multiple generations, having served as the inspiration for numerous revolutionary movements around the world; from China to Vietnam, Cuba to Laos, its legacy, both the good and the bad, remains with us. With all of that in mind, it is crucial that we make an honest and objective appraisal of the Soviet state, taking into account both its undeniable achievements and its serious flaws, not to mention the often appalling conduct of its leaders. This task is especially important for

socialists, as the USSR is ultimately a crucial part of our political tradition, and as such, it is necessary for us to reckon with it in a properly objective way.

Economic Growth and Living Standards

To begin with, it must be noted that Soviet socialism was able to produce impressively rapid economic growth, as well as significant improvements in quality of life. According to a 2018 [paper](#) by Cambridge sociologist David Lane:

The Soviet period of economic development greatly enhanced the USSR's economic power. All the state socialist societies experienced significant advances in living standards, life expectancy and particularly the provision of social goods and services.

Similarly, in a 2020 [paper](#) in the journal *Critical Sociology*, Lane says the following:

The Soviet Union, under the leadership of the Communist Party, constructed an urban-industrial society, and advances were made in the development of the productive forces. The communist societies, through central economic planning, utilized economic surplus for industrial and social development and secured high levels of employment, [as well as] comprehensive provision of education and health; the working classes gained considerably from these developments. [...] The Bolsheviks when in power developed a Soviet modernizing social formation – a planned economy operating without either markets or a capitalist class and providing a full-employment welfare state – a form of economy qualitatively different from, and an alternative in many ways superior to, capitalism.

In a 2003 [paper](#) summarizing his book *Farm to Factory*, economic historian Robert C. Allen argues that "the Soviet economy performed well," noting that it achieved "high rates of capital accumulation, rapid GDP growth, and rising per capita consumption even in the 1930's," and that "recent research shows that the standard of living also increased briskly." He attributes this success directly to the Bolshevik revolution, as well as the socialist economic system which emerged from it:

This success would not have occurred without the 1917 revolution or the planned development of state owned industry.

(For more information on economic growth and living standards in the USSR, including a comparison of the NEP and the Stalinist model, see Allen's 2005 [paper](#) in the journal *Comparative Economic Studies*, as well as his 2009 [paper](#) in the *Journal of Economic History*.) That being said, the system was ultimately unable to satisfy growing consumer demand. As Lane notes, "the countries of the Soviet bloc could not match the consumer society of the

West." The system also suffered from serious inefficiencies and incentive problems. According to a 2016 [paper](#) by Marxist philosopher Domenico Losurdo:

The [Soviet] experiment produced a very advanced welfare state but ended in failure: in the last years of the Soviet Union, it was characterized by mass absenteeism and disengagement in the workplace; this stalled productivity, and it became hard to find any application of the principle that Marx said should preside over socialism—remuneration according to the quantity and quality of work delivered.

The Soviet system contained serious internal contradictions, as well as a number of dreadful policy decisions, which caused great suffering, and ultimately contributed to the USSR's eventual breakup. As Allen says:

Collectivization and political repression were human catastrophes that brought at most meagre economic returns. The strength of central planning also contained the seeds of its own undoing, for it brought with it the need for someone to plan centrally. When plan objectives became misguided, as in the Brezhnev period, the system stagnated.

This stagnation led to serious political and economic dissatisfaction. In his 2013 [book](#) *The Capitalist Transformation of State Socialism*, David Lane says the following:

Insufficient growth in living standards was a cause of public frustration and a stimulus for economic reform. The failure of perestroika to improve the standard of living led to further political agitation and reform.

It is these lessons which served as the basis for economic reforms in the People's Republic of China (later to be emulated in Vietnam and Laos), which introduced market elements to develop society's productive forces, whilst retaining the dominant status of public ownership and the guiding role of state-owned enterprises. As Domenico Losurdo noted in his aforementioned [paper](#), "Chinese market socialism has achieved extraordinary success," providing the sustained growth that the Soviet model was unable to deliver. To learn more about the Chinese model of socialism (particularly the continued role of public ownership), I recommend the 2019 [book](#) *The Basic Economic System of China*, authored by a group of prominent Chinese economists.

Political Participation and Human Rights

The Soviet system was claimed by its supporters to be a higher and more legitimate form of democracy than that found in the West, while simultaneously its detractors tarred it as a totalitarian despotism, with no room for popular participation. In fittingly dialectical fashion, the truth is something of a synthesis between these two views, as the Soviet system contained

elements of genuine democracy and workers' participation, within the overall framework of an authoritarian state.

In a [paper](#) for the International Council for Central and East European Studies, historian Robert Thurston notes that while the upper-levels of the USSR's political system were dictatorial, "at the lower levels of society, in day-to-day affairs and the implementation of policy, [the Soviet system] was participatory." While there were limits to criticism, Thurston notes that "such bounds allowed a great deal that was deeply significant to workers, including some aspects of production norms, pay rates and classifications, safety on the job, housing, and treatment by managers. This occurred at a time when American workers in particular were struggling for basic union recognition, which even when won did not provide much formal influence at the work place." He continues:

Far from basing its rule on the negative means of coercion, the Soviet regime in the late 1930's fostered a limited but positive political role for the populace. [...] Earlier concepts of the Soviet state require rethinking: the workers who ousted managers, achieved the imprisonment of their targets, and won reinstatement at factories did so through organizations which constituted part of the state apparatus and wielded state powers.

In a 2014 [paper](#) in the *Japanese Political Science Review*, professor Kazuko Kawamoto (Hitotsubashi University) states that the USSR had "a more democratic face than what is usually imagined, especially among Western people." As they put it:

The Soviet regime was democratic in its own sense of the word... participation through sending letters and attending discussions gave self-government a certain reality and helped to legitimize the Soviet regime. Therefore, listening to the people was an important obligation for the authorities... the government encouraged people to send letters to the authorities and actively used the all-people's discussions.

With that being said, it must not be forgotten that the Soviet regime was ultimately a dictatorial one. Criticism of high-level officials could result in serious punishment; one Soviet émigré, quoted by Thurston, said the following:

The Soviet system is a dictatorship... there exists a big criticism of the small and responsible workers excluding criticism of the regime, the party or the Politburo. No doubt in their authority can be expressed, and a word against the regime, the Politburo or the party and this is the end of you.

While some of our more "anti-revisionist" comrades attempt to justify these abuses of power on the basis of material conditions, the academic evidence simply does not support them. To quote Michael Parenti (a superb Marxist-Leninist if there ever was one), from his excellent [book](#) *Blackshirts and Reds*:

The exigencies of revolutionary survival did not "make inevitable" the heartless execution of hundreds of Old Bolshevik leaders, the personality cult of a supreme leader who claimed every revolutionary gain as his own achievement, the suppression of party political life through terror, the eventual silencing of debate regarding the pace of industrialization and collectivization, the ideological regulation of all intellectual and cultural life, and the mass deportations of "suspect" nationalities.

It does us no good as Marxists to deny the major flaws of the Soviet political system; it was undeniably authoritarian, and its track record is littered with human rights abuses. That being said, it *also* does us no good to ignore the elements of genuine democracy and popular participation that existed within it, which gave Soviet workers some measure of real control over their working lives (something that workers in the capitalist world could hardly have dreamed of at this time). Rather, we must make a proper dialectical analysis, appreciating the contradictory and fragmented nature of the system as it really was, and using these analysis as a blueprint for future socialist construction.

Conclusion

If the continued debate over the legacy of the USSR has proven anything, it is that a proper analysis of the world's first socialist state is essential to one's overall political analysis. As Marxists, it is essential that we do not lose sight of the great achievements of the Soviet Union, whilst also carrying out a thorough critique of the problematic and repressive aspects of the society.

In the next section (*hopefully* to be completed soon), I intend to look at the USSR's role on the world stage, its contributions to the global anti-imperialist struggle, etc. Hopefully this will shed some light on the much-contested issue of "social imperialism," which has recently regained its relevance with regards to the People's Republic of China.

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Masterpost on the German Democratic Republic (East Germany)

Introduction

Throughout its 41 year existence, the German Democratic Republic (GDR) found itself constantly at the center of the Cold War. The Berlin Wall, set up to divide East Berlin from FRG-controlled West Berlin, quickly became the most famous symbol of the conflict. Despite this, most people (including most socialists) know relatively little about this nation; how its economy functioned, what kind of life did it give its people, etc. However, in light of recent events, such as studies finding that [57% of East Germans have a positive view of the GDR](#), many people have grown more curious about this particular country. As such, in this post we will go over various aspects of the GDR in detail.

All sources are listed at the bottom. I will indicate which source I am using whenever I quote from one.

Historical Background and Starting Conditions (WWII and Pre-War Era)

World War II left Germany a shadow of its former self. Cities had been leveled, and the economy had been utterly devastated. East Germany in particular was at a serious disadvantage; in fact, the wealth disparity between East and West Germany was already in

place long before the GDR was established. According to a [study](#) in the *European Journal of Economic History*:

The "Great Divergence" between East and West in industrial efficiency did not begin in 1948, when the institutional development of the two parts of the country took fundamentally different paths. The main factors contributing to this divergence were already present earlier.

Eastern Germany had always been far less industrialized than Western Germany, and as such, it had depended largely upon the West for its economic needs. According the US Federal Research Division's [study](#) of East Germany:

Before World War II, the area that later became East Germany was not well developed industrially. Because this area lacked raw materials, heavy industry was generally located in other parts of the German state. Compounding the problems for the newly created East German state in 1949 was the massive destruction during World War II of the industrial plant that had existed there and the subsequent Soviet dismantling and removal of factories and equipment that had survived the war. [...] During the interwar years, the territory that is now East Germany was profoundly dependent on external economic ties. In the mid-1930's, it shipped almost half of its total production to the other parts of Germany... This domestic trade featured sales of agricultural products; textiles; products of light industry, such as cameras, typewriters, and optical equipment; and purchases of industrial goods and equipment.

In other words, East Germany depended totally on the West for its heavy industrial needs, and paid for these needs by selling its agricultural and light industrial products. However, after the war, this balance between East and West was thrown off. According to the US Federal Research Division:

Major dislocations occurred after World War II, when Germany was divided into two sections, one part dominated by the Soviet Union, and the other by the Western Allies. Because it could no longer rely on its former system of internal and external trading, the Soviet Zone of Occupation had to be restructured and made more self-sufficient through the construction of basic industry.

This was no small feat for the fledgling GDR, especially seeing as it received virtually no large-scale economic aid from the USSR (which was too busy rebuilding itself after WWII to worry about pumping money into East Germany). In addition, the GDR had to pay heavy reparations to the USSR for the damage caused during WWII. This acted as a major obstacle to development. According to *The East German Economy, 1945-2010*, published by the German Historical Institute, direct and indirect reparations paid by East Germany between 1946 and 1953 amounted to \$14 billion in 1938 prices. Another statement on this is found in the US Federal Research Division's study:

The reorientation and restructuring of the East German economy would have been difficult in any case. The substantial reparations costs that the Soviet Union imposed on its occupied zone, and later on East Germany, made the process even more difficult. Payments continued into the early 1950's, ending only with the death of Stalin. According to Western estimates, these payments amounted to about 25 percent of total East German production through 1953.

This is in direct contrast to the West, which received large aid investments from the United States as part of the Marshall Plan, as well as lucrative trade relationships with the developed nations.

Now, let us examine how the GDR developed in spite of these factors.

Economic Growth and Industrial Development

Despite all of the aforementioned significant disadvantages, the East German economy managed to overcome its difficulties and develop at an impressively rapid rate. While the FRG had an overall larger economy than the GDR, there is a real argument to be made that the GDR achieved a faster rate of growth. Perhaps the most extensive [study](#) on this topic was done by Gerhard Heske, published in the journal *Historical Social Research* in Germany; however, seeing as this study is about three-hundred pages long, I'll quote a summary [article](#) from the University of Bremen:

From 1951 to 1989, the GDR achieved an average GDP growth rate of 4.5%, the FRG 4.3%. From 1961 to 1985, these growth rates were higher in the GDR than in the FRG.

Heavy industry grew especially rapidly. According to the US Federal Research Division: During the 1950's, East Germany made significant economic progress, at least as indicated by the gross figures. By 1960 investment had grown by a factor of about 4.5, while gross industrial production had increased by a factor of about 2.9. Within that broad category of industrial production, the basic sectors, such as machinery and transport equipment, grew especially rapidly, while the consumer sectors such as textiles lagged behind.

Despite the priority given to heavy industry, consumption also increased steadily during this period:

Consumption grew significantly in the first years, although from a very low base, and showed respectable growth rates over the entire decade.

At the end of the 1950's, some analysts feared an economic crisis in the East, spurred by the "brain drain" from East to West; however, this did not occur, and the East German economy continued to grow impressively in the 1960's. The US Federal Research Division reports:

As the 1950's ended, pessimism about the future seemed rather appropriate. Surprisingly, however, after the construction of the Berlin Wall and several years of consolidation and realignment, East Germany entered a period of impressive economic growth that produced clear benefits for the people. For the years 1966-1970, GDP and national income grew at average annual rates of 6.3 and 5.2 percent, respectively. Simultaneously, investment grew at an average annual rate of 10.7 percent, retail trade at 4.6 percent, and real per capita income at 4.2 percent.

This growth continued on through the next decade:

As of 1970, growth rates in the various sectors of the economy did not differ greatly from those of a decade earlier... Production reached about 140 to 150 percent of the levels of a decade earlier... The growth rates in production resulted in substantial increases in personal consumption... throughout the 1970's the East German economy as a whole enjoyed relatively strong and stable growth. In 1971, First Secretary Honecker declared the "raising of the material and cultural living standard" of the population to be a "principal task" of the economy; private consumption grew at an average annual rate of 4.8 percent from 1971 to 1975 and 4.0 percent from 1976 to 1980... The 1976-1980 Five Year Plan achieved an average annual growth rate of 4.1 percent.

The 1980's saw some economic difficulties for the GDR as Western banks clamped down on credit for the East and the USSR reduced oil deliveries by ten percent. This led to a period of slow growth as the GDR rushed to step up exports; despite this, the economy did manage to pull through and deliver impressive growth results during this period (though it did fall short of the plan). The US Federal Research Division reports:

The 1981-1985 plan period proved to be a difficult time for the East German economy... However, by the end of the period the economy had chalked up a respectable overall performance, with an average annual growth rate of 4.5 percent (the plan target had been 5.1 percent).

The overall impacts of the industrialization strategy of the GDR were extremely positive. As the US Federal Research Division reported in 1988:

Industry is the dominant sector of the East German economy, and is the principal basis for the relatively high standard of living. East Germany ranks among the world's top industrial nations, and in the Comecon it ranks second only to the Soviet Union.

A general summary of East German economic performance can also be found in the aforementioned report:

The economy of the German Democratic Republic (East Germany) has developed impressively since its founding in 1949. By almost any indicator, it stands at the top of the socialist world in economic

development and performance [...] The condition of the economy is all the more remarkable when one considers the circumstances under which it has developed. The country was devastated during World War II. Subsequently Soviet occupation of East German territory placed heavy burdens on the population and resources. In addition, the partitioning of the German lands after the war seriously disrupted the economy. East Germany's heavy industry capacity was very low, and its raw material supplies, except for lignite (low-grade) coal and potash, were almost nonexistent. The fact that the country for many years lacked international recognition as a sovereign state certainly did not contribute to economic growth, and its population loss before construction of the Berlin Wall was a significant drain on labor resources.

Overall, the socialist system in the GDR managed to industrialize the nation at a rapid rate, enabling the country to sustain itself without constant infusions from the West. It did this despite numerous aforementioned disadvantages, a feat which should be celebrated.

Increases in Living Standards

The socialist system in the GDR did not only succeed in rapidly developing the nation; it also provided a steadily increasing quality of life for the people. The US Federal Research Division reports:

The East German standard of living has improved greatly since 1949 [when the GDR was established]. Most observers, both East and West, agree that in the 1980's East Germans enjoyed the highest standard of living in Eastern Europe. Major improvements occurred, especially after 1971, when the Honecker regime announced its commitment to fulfilling the "principal task" of the economy, which was defined as the enhancement of the material and cultural well-being of all citizens.

This focus on increasing quality of life for all citizens, rather than providing profit for the capitalist class, is a unique feature of the socialist system, which provided steadily improving living standards. The US Federal Research Division states:

Since the inception of the regime, the monthly earned income of the average East German has increased steadily in terms of effective purchasing power. According to the 1986 East German statistical yearbook, the average monthly income for workers in the socialized sector of the economy increased from 311 GDR marks in 1950 to 555 GDR marks in 1960, 755 GDR marks in 1970, and 1,130 GDR marks in 1985. Because most consumer prices had been stable during this time, the 1985 figure represented a better-than-threefold increase over the past thirty-five years.

State subsidies meant that basic necessities (food, housing, etc.), public services (healthcare, education, etc.), and even small luxuries (restaurant meals, concerts, etc.) were all remarkably

cheap, especially when compared to the capitalist West. The US Federal Research Division reports:

In East Germany, the GDR mark can purchase a great number of basic necessities because the state subsidizes their production and distribution to the people. Thus housing, which consumes a considerable portion of the earnings of an average family in the West, constituted less than 3 percent of the expenditures of a typical worker family in 1984. Milk, potatoes, bread, and public transportation were also relatively cheap. Many services, such as medical care and education, continued to be available without cost to all but a very few. Even restaurant meals, concerts, and postage stamps were inexpensive by Western standards... In the mid-1980's, East Germans had no difficulty obtaining meat, butter, potatoes, bread, clothing, and most other essentials.

The housing situation was also greatly improved:

Beginning in the 1960's, the government initiated a major campaign to provide modern housing facilities; it sought to eliminate the longstanding housing shortage, and modernize fully the existing stock by 1990. By the early 1980's, the program had provided nearly 2 million new or renovated units, and 2 million more were to be added by 1990. As of 1985, progress in this area appeared to be satisfactory, and plan targets were being met or exceeded.

The situation in terms of consumer goods was also improving; the US Federal Research Division reports that as of 1985 in the GDR, 99 percent of households had a refrigerator, 92 percent had a washing machine, and 93 percent had a television. These numbers are comparable to the United States in 2016 (though washing machine ownership was higher, and TV ownership slightly lower, in the GDR).

Economists had often thought that the GDR mark was weaker in terms of purchasing power than the West German D-mark; however, a study from the Institute for Economic Research in West Berlin (as reported by the US Federal Research Division) disproved this idea:

In 1983, the Institute for Economic Research in West Berlin undertook one of its periodic studies in which the purchasing power of the GDR mark was measured against that of the West German D-mark... The Institute concluded that, as a whole, the GDR mark should be considered to have 106 percent of the value of the D-mark in purchasing power, an impressive gain over the 76 percent estimated for 1960, 86 percent for 1969, and 100 percent for 1977... the analysis clearly invalidated the view commonly held in the West that the GDR mark had very little purchasing power.

Overall, the socialist system in the GDR managed to steadily and rapidly increase quality of life for the people, despite the numerous disadvantages facing the country.

Healthcare in East Germany

The GDR provided medical treatment free of charge to its people. This system allowed East Germany to keep up with West Germany in terms of healthcare conditions, despite the latter being wealthier (by virtue of its extensive trade relations with developed nations).

A [study](#) published in the *Health Care Financing Review* (a US government-affiliated publication) reports:

In terms of real resources devoted to health services and in terms of health service activities, the two countries seem to have been fairly similar. The GDR was reported as having 2.3 physicians per thousand in 1985 (World Health Organization, 1987), compared with 2.6 in the FRG. In 1977, the GDR was reported as having 10.6 hospital beds per thousand, compared with 11.8 in the FRG, and both countries had similar levels of dentists and pharmacists per thousand. Hospital length of stay was reported as similar in the two countries. Given that hospital beds per thousand were similar, this suggests that admission rates were not very different. Finally, consultation rates with doctors seem to have been similar in the two countries at 9.0 per person in the GDR in 1976 and 10.9 per person in the FRG in 1975 (Health OECD: Facts and Trends, forthcoming).

The study confirms the much lower cost of healthcare in East Germany:

If the GDR enjoyed a similar volume of health services to the FRG but had much lower health expenditures per capita, then the prices of health services must have been much lower in the GDR.

The GDR maintained high healthcare standards, which improved steadily, and in some cases faster than those in the West (though starting at a lower level; Eastern Germany had always been worse-off in terms of health than the West). The aforementioned study states:

Turning to health status, in 1987, the reported expectation of life at birth in eastern Germany, 69.9 years for males and 76.0 for females, was not far behind that of western Germany at 72.2 for males and 78.9 for females. The infant mortality rate, which had been 7.2 per 100 in 1950, had fallen to 0.92 in 1986. Although the infant mortality rate was above that of western Germany in 1986 (0.85), the fall since 1950 had been larger. If the official figures can be believed, the former GDR had respectable health statistics for a country with its standard of living... Improvements to health status in eastern Germany seem to have kept up, more or less, with those in western Germany.

Overall, healthcare standards in East German were highly respectable, especially when one remembers the disadvantages facing the GDR, as well as the fact that healthcare was provided free to all people, which cannot be said of the West.

Education and Childcare in East Germany

The educational system in the GDR was very solid. For one thing, there was widespread access to preschool and kindergarten services. According to the US Federal Research Division: Attendance at kindergarten was not mandatory, but the majority of children from ages three to six attended. The state considered kindergartens an important element of the overall educational program. The schools focused on health and physical fitness, development of socialist values, and the teaching of rudimentary skills. The regime has experimented with combined schools of childcare centers and kindergartens, which introduce the child gradually into a more regimented program of activities and ease the pains of adjustment. In 1985 there were 13,148 preschools providing care for 788,095 children (about 91 percent of children eligible to attend).

After kindergarten, children entered the compulsory stage of education:

Compulsory education began at the age of six, when every child entered the ten-grade, coeducational general poly-technical school. The program was divided into three sections. The primary stage included grades one through three, where children were taught the basic skills of reading, writing, and mathematics. The primary stage also introduced children to the fundamentals of good citizenship and, in accordance with the 1965 education law, provided them with their "first knowledge and understanding of nature, work, and socialist society." Instruction emphasized German language, literature, and art as a means of developing the child's expressive and linguistic skills; about 60 percent of classroom time was devoted to this component. Mathematics instruction accounted for about 24 percent of the curriculum and included an introduction to fundamental mathematical laws and relations. Another 8 percent was devoted to physical education, which comprised exercises, games, and activities designed to develop coordination and physical skill. Poly-technical instruction was also begun at the primary level and consisted of gardening and crafts that gave the child a basic appreciation of technology, the economy, and the worker; about 8 percent of classroom time was allotted to such instruction.

After completing mandatory education, students had several choices:

Upon completion of the compulsory ten-year education, the student had essentially three options. The most frequently chosen option was to begin a two-year period of vocational training. In 1985 about 86 percent of those who had completed their ten-year course of study began some kind of vocational training. During vocational training, the student became an apprentice, usually at a local or state enterprise. Students received eighteen months of training in selected vocations and specialized in the final six months. In 1985 approximately 6 percent of those who had completed their poly-technical education entered a three-year program of vocational training. This program led to the Abitur, or end-of-school examination. Passing the Abitur enabled the student to apply to a technical institute or university, although this route to higher education was considered very difficult. In 1985 East Germany had a total of 963 vocational schools; 719 were connected with

industries, and another 244 were municipal vocational schools. Vocational schools served 377,567 students.

Students were guaranteed a job upon completing the ten-year compulsory education:

The educational system's major goal was producing technically qualified personnel to fill the manpower needs of the economy. The government guaranteed employment to those who completed the mandatory ten-year program.

The university system was also of remarkably high-quality, and attendance was extremely inexpensive (though entrance requirements were very competitive):

In 1985 East Germany had 54 universities and colleges, with a total enrollment of 129,628 students. Women made up about 50 percent of the student population. Courses in engineering and technology headed the list of popular subjects. Medicine, economics, and education were also popular choices. There were 239 technical institutions, with a total student population of 162,221. About 61 percent of the students studied full time, while the remainder enrolled in correspondence study or took evening classes. The three most popular fields of study at the institutes were medicine and health, engineering and technology, and economics. Courses at the university and technical institutes consisted primarily of lectures and examinations. Completion of the program led to a diploma or license, depending on the field of study.

As of the mid-1980's, higher education was very inexpensive, and many of the textbooks were provided free of charge. Full or partial financial assistance in the form of scholarships was available for most students, and living expenses were generally minimal because most students continued to live at home during their courses of study. Germans have a high regard for education, and the regime has generally supported young people who have wanted to upgrade their level of skills through further training or education.

Overall, the educational system in the German Democratic Republic was high-quality and widely accessible to all.

Women's Rights in East Germany

The GDR had a remarkably strong record in protecting women's rights, far stronger than the capitalist West. According to the US Federal Research Division:

The East German record in the area of women's rights has been good. Women have been well-represented in the work force, comprising about half of the economically active population. As of 1984, 96pprox.. 80 percent of women of working age (between eighteen and sixty) were employed.

The state has encouraged women to seek work and pursue careers and has provided aid to working mothers in the form of day-care centers generous maternity benefits.

Women's access to education was very strong in the GDR, again much stronger than in the capitalist West:

The state also has made a concerted effort to provide educational opportunities for women. The number of women with a university or technical school education has increased over the years. Of the students enrolled in universities and colleges in 1985, about 50 percent were women.

Birth control was widely-available and free of cost, and abortion was available upon the woman's request. The US Federal Research Division reports:

A liberal abortion law, promulgated in 1972 amid protests from religious circles, permits abortion upon request of the mother... As of the mid 1980's, information on contraceptive methods was available to the public, and women could obtain birth control pills at no cost.

In addition, the state sought to provide assistance to working mothers through a highly-developed child-care system:

An elaborate network of daycare centers provides care for the child while the mother is at work. In 1984 there were 6,605 year-round nurseries with room for 296,653 children. These nurseries provided care for 63 percent of eligible children.

Overall, the situation for women in East Germany was far better than it was in West Germany, and the GDR's women's rights record was quite impressive.

Buyer's Remorse - The Disaster of 1989

Most people in the West imagine the fall of the GDR as a time of widespread euphoria and freedom; however, for millions of people in East Germany this was far from the case. One excellent account of this time was written by Bruni de la Motte, an East German woman who has since become a British trade union negotiator. In her [article](#) (published in the *Guardian*), she reports that widespread unemployment and misery occurred after the fall of communism:

Little is known here [the West] about what happened to the GDR economy when the wall fell. Once the border was open the government decided to set up a trusteeship to ensure that "publicly owned enterprises" (the majority of businesses) would be transferred to the citizens who'd created the wealth. However, a few months before unification, the then newly elected conservative government handed over the trusteeship to west German appointees, many representing big business interests. The idea of "publicly owned" assets being transferred to citizens was quietly dropped. Instead all

assets were privatized at breakneck speed. More than 85% were bought by West Germans and many were closed soon after. In the countryside 1.7 million hectares of agricultural and forest land were sold off and 80% of agricultural workers lost their job.

Another [article](#) from the *Guardian* reports on the long-term impact this has had on the economy in Eastern Germany, noting that there has been virtually no advancement in the East-to-West productivity ratio since 1991:

Productivity in the former east was 70% of that in the west in 1991 and rose to just 73% in 2012, in part a legacy of the number of factories that were bought by West German industrialists and deliberately run into the ground to scotch competition... Experts say the fact that most of the large industry and production bases are in the west and that those in the east are far smaller – with most employers in agriculture or service industries like meat-processing and call centres – will have a long-term effect of increasingly holding back the economy in the east and ensuring that the wage discrepancy remains and likely worsens.

Bruni de la Motte notes that a mass-purging of academia and professional life took place after the fall of communism:

Large numbers of ordinary workers lost their jobs, but so too did thousands of research workers and academics. As a result of the purging of academia, research and scientific establishments in a process of political vetting, more than a million individuals with degrees lost their jobs. This constituted about 50% of that group, creating in East Germany the highest percentage of professional unemployment in the world; all university chancellors and directors of state enterprises as well as 75,000 teachers lost their jobs and many were blacklisted. This process was in stark contrast to what happened in West Germany after the war, when few ex-Nazis were treated in this manner.

A housing crisis, as well as the mass seizure of workers' homes, also took place:

In the GDR everyone had a legally guaranteed security of tenure and ownership to the properties where they lived. After unification, 2.2m claims by non-GDR citizens were made on their homes. Many lost houses they'd lived in for decades; a number committed suicide rather than give them up. Ironically, claims for restitution the other way around, by East Germans on properties in the West, were rejected as "out of time".

She remarks that since the fall of communism, many people have come to appreciate the benefits that socialism offered:

Since the demise of the GDR, many have come to recognize and regret that the genuine "social achievements" they enjoyed were dismantled: social and gender equality, full employment and lack of existential fears, as well as subsidized rents, public transport, culture and sports facilities.

Unfortunately, the collapse of the GDR and "state socialism" came shortly before the collapse of the "free market" system in the west.

This is supported by the fact that (as mentioned above) 57% of former East Germans say that life was better under communism (see sources below). For further writing by Bruni de la Motte, I recommend her book *Stasi Hell or Workers' Paradise? Socialism in the GDR - What Can We Learn From It?* This book presents an honest appraisal of the successes and failures of the German Democratic Republic from the perspective of somebody who actually grew up, went to school, worked, and raised a family there. I will link it in the sources below.

Conclusion

The German Democratic Republic was not a perfect society, and it is unwise to pretend that is was; however, it did provide a high standard of living to its people, coupled with strong economic and social security. Guaranteed employment, housing, healthcare, and education, as well as subsidies on basic necessities; strong protections for the rights of women and children; widely available and inexpensive cultural activities such as theaters and concerts; these are benefits which many millions of people have come to sorely miss in the years since the GDR's fall.

Perhaps the best summation of this complex topic is given by Bruni de la Motte, in the conclusion to her book *Stasi Hell or Workers' Paradise*:

The GDR experience of socialism stands in marked contrast to the dismantling of the welfare state and the concomitant rampant privatization of every aspect of life now taking place in Western Europe, from culture to healthcare and other essential services, as well as to the denial of social values and the extreme individualization of life. We live in an atomized society, rapidly falling apart, with little social ethos and no long-term goals. Many today, especially young people, are living without hope or sense of a secure future. Socialism can still offer an antidote and an alternative. And the experience of socialist countries like the GDR can provide pointers for a way forward and help renew one's hope.

In our age of late capitalism, climate change, and resurgent fascism, this message is more relevant than ever before.

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Masterpost on the People's Socialist Republic of Albania, With Sources

"In order to build we must know, and in order to know we must learn." - Slogan of the Albanian Literacy Campaign

Introduction

The People's Socialist Republic of Albania is something of an enigma. It is simultaneously one of the most well-known and least-understood of all socialist nations. The only thing that most people know about socialist Albania is that it was led for most of its existence by Enver Hoxha, a man who hated revisionism and adored bunkers. But there is a great deal more to this nation than most of us are aware, and it should be studied; it offers both an exemplary case of the achievements that socialism is capable of, and a cautionary tale about the dangers of isolationism and dogmatism. As always, all sources will be listed at the end.

Pre-Communist Albania

Before World War II, Albania was the poorest nation in Europe. The country had not even undergone a real industrial revolution, and as such depended almost entirely on agriculture. As a result of this, along with the semi-feudal property relations that existed at the time, Albania had one of the lowest per-capita incomes in the world. According to James O'Donnell's 1999 [book](#) *A Coming of Age: Albania Under Enver Hoxha*, published by the Columbia University Press:

Prior to World War II... the Albanian economy was in shambles. [...] The total contribution of industrial production to net material product was only 4.4 percent (another source says this figure was actually less than 4 percent) in 1938. [...] Plus, in 1927 and 1928, the per capita average annual income was only \$40.07, as compared to Bulgaria \$67.57, Greece \$75.75, Yugoslavia \$76.93, and Romania \$77.74. Thus, prior to World War II, due to the primitive state of the Albanian economy, Albanians earned approximately only one-half to two-thirds of that of its poor Balkan neighbors.

Despite Albania's heavy reliance on agriculture, even this sector was critically underdeveloped before World War II. The majority of the country's peasants were landless, and only a tiny portion of the country's land was under cultivation to begin with. To quote:

[N]inety percent of the total national income was derived from agriculture despite having only seven to nine percent of the land under cultivation. In addition, in 1938, eighty-eight percent of the population lived in rural areas, but fifty-three percent of the peasants had no land. More than forty percent of the cultivable land was held by large landowners and only three percent of the peasants. The level of mechanization was extremely primitive as there were only thirty-two tractors in the entire country.

Things only got worse after the war, which killed almost eight percent of the population ("the most active part of the labor forces"). Despite some infrastructure construction by the fascist occupiers, the overall effect on the nation was calamitous. O'Donnell writes:

This bleak economic picture regressed further during World War II and Albania found itself in a quite precarious economic position when Enver Hoxha and the Albanian Party of Labor assumed power. The fighting destroyed much of what useful material existed for economic purposes. In fact, Albania's damage per capita has been estimated as the highest in Europe.

As bad as pre-communist Albania's economic situation was, things may have been even worse when it came to healthcare. Medical resources were in pitifully short supply, whilst life expectancy and mortality rates were among the worst in the world. According to a 1998 [study](#) from the London School of Economics:

[When] the communists took over in Albania in 1945, the state of the population's health and the Albanian health system were in a very bad state. [...] The number of doctors was very low - only 102 Albanian doctors and a very small number of foreign doctors. Thus, the number of physicians (doctors and dentists) per 10,000 of the population was only 1.17, while the number of beds for 1,000 of population only 0.98. [...] According to the League of Nations in 1941, the crude death rate for Albania in 1938 was 17.7 per thousand. In a later study a figure on life expectancy at birth is given for 1938 as 38 years. Even these figures are thought not to be accurate, because death registration was not complete. [...] The majority of villagers died without any medical intervention. In the early twenties over half of the country's 2,540 villages had never been visited by a doctor.

Education was another serious problem; in rural areas, it was virtually nonexistent. To quote the aforementioned study from the LSE:

The end of the second World War found Albania in a very poor educational state. At that time 80% of the population was illiterate, and in the rural areas this figure reached 90-95%. Illiteracy was widespread in rural areas and in particular among women. Immediately upon seizure of power in 1944, the communist regime gave high priority to opening schools and organizing the whole educational system along communist lines. An intensive campaign against illiteracy started immediately.

Finally, it must be noted that pre-communist Albania was one of the most reactionary societies on Earth with regards to women's rights. To quote the aforementioned study:

For most women, traditional Albanian life was characterized by discrimination and inequality compared with men, reinforced by a wide range of cultural norms. [...] In the immediate pre-war period there were just 21 female teachers in the country, a couple of women doctors and no female engineers, agronomists or chemists. Only 2.4 percent of secondary school students were girls.

The Code of Leke (the traditional pre-war Albanian code of law relating to women) was harshly discriminatory. Even murder of a pregnant woman was punished differently depending on the sex of the fetus she was carrying:

... the dead woman [is] to be opened up, in order to see whether the fetus is a boy or a girl. If it is a boy, the murderer must pay 3 purses [a set amount of local currency] for the woman's blood and 6 purses for the boy's blood; if it is a girl, aside from the three purses for the murdered woman, 3 purses must also be paid for the female child.

From all of this, we can clearly see that pre-communist Albania was a desperately poor, semi-feudal society, with dreadful health and educational statistics, and some of the most intense discrimination against women seen anywhere in the world. With that said, let's see what the communists were able to make of this situation.

Economic and Infrastructural Development

When the communists came to power, they swiftly set about transforming the nation's economy. This began with a sweeping land reform law, which sought to eliminate the semi-feudal property relations which existed in Albania at the time. O'Donnell writes:

The building of the Albanian economy began in earnest with the passing of the Agrarian Reform Law in August 1945. This law removed from the country all of the sprawling estates owned by the beys and large landowners. All forests and pasture land and all land owned by people with non-farm income was expropriated without compensation. [...] Landless peasants were each given five hectares per family, with more being given for each married son who lived on the family's property. [...] This law is significant because it demonstrated to the peasants the viability of the new government.

Agrarian reform had a profound effect on the distribution of land in Albania, becoming "a significant development in terms of gradually leading Albania into the twentieth century." To quote:

Albania was transformed from a land of large estates to one of 70,000 small farms. Prior to this law, 52.43 percent of all land in Albania was owned by large landowners, 28.07 percent of the land was owned by small farmers and the state owned 18.71 percent. After the Reform Law was passed, the beys owned only 16.38 percent of the land, small farmers owned 43.17 percent and the previously landless peasants owned 34.63 percent.

In the industrial sector, the communists quickly moved to nationalize what little industry existed, and then began to focus on rapidly developing the nation's industrial capacity. O'Donnell writes:

The growth of Albania's industry was quite amazing, in both speed and in extent. When one considers the extent of damage done in Albania during World War II, it is quite impressive that Albania was able to recover from this damage and by 1946 equal her pre-war level of industrial production. However, even more impressive is the fact that by 1948, Albania doubled its pre-war industrial production. All must agree that this was a quite encouraging beginning for the new people's government.

An overall summary of the economic situation throughout the first several decades of socialist Albania may be found in the aforementioned study from the London School of Economics. To quote:

The growth of the Net Material Product from one five-year plan to the next was, on average, nearly 44 percent, with industry recording the fastest growth rates during this period. The average growth of industry from 1951 to 1975 was 82.5 percent. The share of agriculture declined from 80 percent during the first five-year plan (1951-55) to 36% in the fifth plan (1971-75), while the corresponding figures for industry were 14 percent and 35 percent, respectively.

Infrastructural development was also remarkably substantial. Perhaps the most important of these developments was the electrification of the entire country, which Albania was one of the first nations on Earth to achieve. O'Donnell writes:

One of the great accomplishments, with the most far-reaching implications in many spheres of Albanian life; economic, cultural, social, educational, etc. which Albania achieved throughout the entire period of Enver Hoxha's years in power was the electrification of the country. Prior to the government of Hoxha, many remote mountain villages not only did not have electricity, it is quite likely that they did not even know of its existence. [...] Albania achieved total electrification ahead of schedule on October 25, 1970. The significance of this achievement can not be underestimated. This was one of the most significant factors in Albania's history in terms of bringing Albania into the modern world.

Physical and transport infrastructure was developed as well. According to the aforementioned study from the London School of Economics:

The country's highway system was greatly expanded, and by 1985 consisted of 6,900 kilometres of roads capable of carrying motor vehicle traffic, and with a small rail network of about 603 kilometres.

Unfortunately, as Albania entered the 1980s, serious economic problems began to emerge, caused in large part by the isolationist policies pursued by Hoxha, as well as a general lack of investment in the economy, and a rigid adherence to the Stalinist economic model. To quote from the LSE:

In contrast with the previous period, the eighties witnessed a marked slowdown in economic activity, which virtually stagnated during the second half of the decade, reflecting Albania's self-imposed isolation since 1976 and the emergence of serious internal and external imbalances. [...] There are many reasons that sent the Albanian economy into a dead-end street in the eighties. Most significant are the orthodox objectives and methods of management of the communist leadership; the lack of investment in the economy, which brought about a lack in advanced technology; and, most of all, the self-isolation of the country, which brought the Albanian economy to a state of total collapse in 1990.

O'Donnell largely concurs with these sentiments, noting that "Enver Hoxha and the rest of the leadership of the Albanian Party of Labor definitely became infected with the mechanicalness of their followers." He also notes a lack of modern technology as a serious problem. To quote: There is no question that the Albanian economy had its share of problems, especially in the latter years of Enver Hoxha's leadership. The economy desperately needed an infusion of modern Western technology. The Albanian technology was obsolete when it was received from the Chinese and Soviets and certainly could not compete with the world's most modern methods in 1985.

Even in spite of these problems, it cannot be denied that the socialist era in Albania was a time of immense economic and infrastructural development, which brought about a drastic betterment in the lives of millions of people. O'Donnell writes that "the Albanian economy must be considered a success within Albanian parameters." He continues:

Despite the obvious shortcomings of the Albanian economy, it is undeniable that economic development did occur in Albania under Enver Hoxha. [...] When one considers that pre-war Albania had practically no industry, the strides forward which were made are extremely impressive... due to the circumstances Albania found itself in after World War II, the Albanian Party of Labor's decision to implement a centralized economy made quite a lot of sense. [...] On the positive side, an objective analysis must conclude that Enver Hoxha's plan to mobilize all of Albania's resources under the

regimentation of a central plan was effective and quite successful... the results achieved, especially in the phases of initial planning and construction of the economic base were both impressive and positive.

In short, the communist government in Albania was able to bring about impressive economic and infrastructural development, with several decades of rapid growth, particularly in the industrial sector. However, the country eventually ran into serious problems, caused largely by the dogmatic insistence on self-reliance and over-adherence to the Stalinist model encouraged by Enver Hoxha.

Healthcare Achievements

Due to the extraordinarily bad health conditions facing the population before 1945, the new communist government quickly made healthcare a leading priority. To quote from the aforementioned study from the LSE:

As explained earlier... when the communists took over in Albania in 1945, the state of the population's health and the Albanian health system were in a very bad state. [...] In order to address this situation, the government starting in 1947, introduced a wide-ranging social insurance and medical scheme. Most medical treatments (thought not the medicines) were provided free. Legislation was introduced to protect the mother and child, and set up the pension scheme, as well as other regulations on sanitary conditions and control, and for the treatment of infectious diseases.

The results of these policies may be clearly seen when looking at the health statistics in Albania. For example, take this chart showing the increase in life expectancy at birth from 1950-1990, taken from the aforementioned LSE study (recall that life expectancy in 1938 was approximately 38 years):

Years	Life Expectancy (Male and Female)
1950	51.6
1954-55	55.0
1960	62.0
1964-65	64.1
1969	66.5
1975-1976	67.0

<i>Years</i>	<i>Life Expectancy (Male and Female)</i>
1979	68.0
1989	70.7

From these statistics, it is clear that the communists achieved an enormous increase in life expectancy, from 38 years in 1938, to 68 years in 1979, an increase of thirty years in just four decades. It continued to improve until 1989, albeit more slowly. The communists also succeeded in eliminating various infectious diseases which had plagued the country, particularly malaria, which had been the biggest killer in pre-war Albania:

A number of endemic diseases were brought under control, including malaria, tuberculosis and syphilis... If one looks at the mortality transition from 1950 to 1990, it is clear that the pattern changes as life expectancy improves. Thus, the infectious and parasitic (tuberculosis included) diseases decline and almost disappear in the seventies and eighties.

Summarizing the issue of medical development during the socialist era, O'Donnell writes that "it is unquestionable that great strides [were] made in the area of health care." He continues: Life expectancy and infant mortality rates [were] greatly improved. Health services as a whole, in terms of quality and most importantly, in terms of availability [were] improved exponentially.

The Albanian communists made a number of extremely impressive achievements in the field of healthcare. Unfortunately, this too began to suffer at the tail-end of the communist period, as a lack of investment and self-imposed isolation took their toll, causing a lack of sufficient medical technology. O'Donnell writes "one must objectively applaud the improvements made which were substantial and indeed a positive development. However, on the other hand, one must also objectively condemn the paucity of modern equipment and supplies due to ideological concerns and isolation." Even still, he closes by arguing that "health care must be considered a positive development in the history of Enver Hoxha's years in power in Albania."

Educational Achievements

Education was another top priority of the communist government, and it received substantial attention as soon as they took power. According to the aforementioned study from the LSE: Immediately upon seizure of power in 1944, the communist regime gave high priority to opening schools and organizing the whole educational system along communist lines. An intensive campaign against illiteracy started immediately.

This emphasis resulted in substantial overall improvements to the educational system, with a great increase in accessibility and attendance. To quote the LSE study:

In terms of enrollments, Albania had a broad-based education system, with almost 90% of the pupils completing the compulsory basic 8-year school and 74% of them continuing into secondary school. From these, more than 40% went to the university. According to official figures, at the end of 1972 there were 700,000 schoolchildren and university students, which meant that every third citizen was enrolled in some kind of educational institution. The number of kindergartens in urban areas increased by 112% from 1970 to 1990, while in rural areas it increased by 150%. The number of primary schools in urban areas, for the same period of time, rose 31%, and in rural areas 24%. The total number of secondary schools increased by 291%, and that of high schools by 60%. A similar trend is seen for the number of students that graduated. Thus the number of pupils that graduated from primary schools for the period 1970-1990 increased by 74.8%, for the secondary school, the number rose 914.2%, and for university 147%. Education tuition was free of charge. Students whose families had low incomes were entitled to scholarships, which gave them free accommodation, food, etc.

The elimination of illiteracy stands as one of the most important achievements of the socialist era in Albania. O'Donnell writes:

In terms of education, where the vast majority of the population was previously illiterate, as a result of Hoxha's educational system, nearly all Albanians can read and write. This is unquestionably a positive and significant achievement.

The study from the LSE largely agrees with this assessment. To quote:

At the end of the eighties, Albania had a rate of illiteracy of less than 5%, placing it among the developed countries. [...] The achievement of universal education must be judged one of the communist regime's main achievements.

All-in-all, education stands as one of the major positive developments of the socialist era, something which even the regime's opponents generally grant as a major achievement.

Social Security

The social security system was a major priority of the communist government. Based on the Soviet model, the communists developed a cradle-to-grave social welfare system throughout the nation. To quote from the aforementioned LSE study:

Social Insurance was first introduced by the Albanian communist government in 1947. The initial social security scheme covered approximately 75,000 people. The social insurance program was

administered by state organizations and covered medical care, compensation for disability, old-age pensions, family allowances, and rest and recreation. Several modifications were made latter to the basic program. The law of 1953 provided a program closely resembling that of the Soviet Union, i.e. a classic cradle-to-grave system of social security. For a number of years trade unions administered a large number of social insurance activities. In 1965 the state took over the administration of all phases except those for rest and recreation facilities.

Maternity leave and disability insurance were provided:

If people lost their capacity to work totally or partially, they were granted invalidity pensions. The amount of the pension varied between 40-85% of the wage depending on the scale of invalidity, cause of invalidity and the number of years that the person had been working. Pregnant women were given eighty-four days leave under normal circumstances and were paid at 95% of their wage if they had worked for more than five years and 75% if they had worked less than five. The pregnancy leave period was extended to six months in 1981. Workers could stay at home for limited periods to care for the sick and during this period received 60% of their pay.

Old-age pensions were also provided to all retired workers:

Old-age pensions were based on age and years of work. Payments were calculated at the rate of 70% of the worker's average monthly wage. Two exceptions were the veterans of the Second World War and the Party leaders who received an additional 10%. The law also provided for widow's and orphan's pensions.

All workers were guaranteed time off from work, with pay:

All insured persons were entitled to a paid vacation. The duration of the vacation depended on the type of work and the length of active employment.

Childcare insurance was also an aspect of the social security system:

When children under seven years of age were ill, one of the parents was permitted up to ten days leave during a three month period. A one-time payment was made to the family for each child that was born. In case of death a fixed sum was paid to the family for funeral expenses.

Eventually, the system was expanded to include peasants in farming cooperatives:

From 1st July 1972 the system of pensions and social security was extended to cover peasants working in agriculture cooperatives. This aimed at the narrowing of the differences between urban and rural areas. Some agricultural cooperatives had already introduced some forms of pensions and social insurance providing help for their members in old age and when they were unable to

work. The financing of this social security system in the rural areas came from the contributions of the cooperatives with some subsidization from the state.

The provision of a cradle-to-grave social welfare system is an enormous achievement, and one of the main advances made by the communist government.

Women's Rights in Albania

Pre-war Albania was one of the most reactionary societies on Earth with regards to women's rights:

For most women, traditional Albanian life was characterized by discrimination and inequality compared with men, reinforced by a wide range of cultural norms... In the immediate pre-war period there were just 21 female teachers in the country, a couple of women doctors and no female engineers, agronomists or chemists. Only 2.4 percent of secondary school students were girls.

The Code of Leke (the traditional pre-war Albanian code of law relating to women) was harshly discriminatory. Even murder of a pregnant woman was punished differently depending on the sex of the fetus she was carrying:

... the dead woman [is] to be opened up, in order to see whether the fetus is a boy or a girl. If it is a boy, the murderer must pay 3 purses [a set amount of local currency] for the woman's blood and 6 purses for the boy's blood; if it is a girl, aside from the three purses for the murdered woman, 3 purses must also be paid for the female child.

In order to rectify this situation, the communists placed an enormous emphasis on women's rights:

When the communists came to power they considered the emancipation of women as an important political measure, linking it with the destiny of socialism and communism. [...] Equality between men and women was stressed continuously and was even included in the Constitution. The Introduction to the Constitution of the PSR of Albania says that "In the unceasing process of the revolution, the Albanian woman won equality in all fields, became a great social force and is advancing towards her complete emancipation." Article 41 of the constitution says: "The woman enjoys equal rights with a man in work, pay, holidays, social security, education, in all social-political activities as well as in the family."

Women became an active part of the workforce, while previously they had been almost entirely excluded:

Equal rights included amongst others the equal right to have a job. Subsidized day-care nurseries and kindergartens, launderettes and canteens at both workplace, and in residential areas were provided, to make it easier for mothers to work. By 1980 women made up 46% of the economically active population, an increase over one quarter compared with 1960.

Women also made huge advanced in access to education, as well as in positions of government power:

Educational opportunities for women also improved considerably. Table 2.5 shows the increase in the percentage of students who were women graduating from university according to specialties. The table shows that the increase in the percentage during the period 1960-1990, for women engineers was 258.6%, while that for agronomists was 206%, for economists 192%. The same policy was adopted for the participation of women in governing of the country.

Edwin E. Jacques discusses this issue in his [book](#) *The Albanians: An Ethnographic History from Prehistoric Times to the Present*. According to Jacques, during the Cultural and Ideological Revolution, women were encouraged to take up *all* jobs, including government posts, which resulted in 40.7% of the People's Councils and 30.4% of the People's Assembly being made up of women, including two women in the Central Committee by 1985. In 1978, 15.1 times as many females attended eight-year schools as had done so in 1938 and 175.7 times as many females attended secondary schools. By 1978, 101.9 times as many women attended higher schools as in 1957.

Even opponents of the communist regime have generally acknowledged the positive developments it made in terms of women's rights. For example, take the following [article](#) from the *Telegraph*, authored by a reactionary writer who grew up in communist Albania: Inspired by the ongoing debate on women's inequalities, I have recently reflected on my own childhood politics and have come to the surprising conclusion that the place to look for solutions to gender inequality is the Communist model.

She comments on the communist encouragement of women in the workforce:

The Communist promise that women should be equal players in the workforce was not an empty one. Women were positively encouraged by government campaigns to embark on all professions, including "manly" jobs, building on the fact they had fought in large numbers alongside the men as partisans during the Second World War. To achieve this they were given trainee-ships, professional qualifications and scholarships. [...] Growing up, I never encountered any suggestion that women in these professions were in any way less capable than men by virtue of their gender and additional role as mothers. On the whole, they faced no barriers of gender discrimination. I remember my parents and their friends frequently praising excellent female doctors and teachers. [...] This form of equal partnership was commonplace in the Albanian society I grew up and importantly women's

role in the family informed how women were viewed in the workplace and vice-versa. If men suggested that women should be relegated to the house they were mocked for their anachronistic ideas.

When even a reactionary writer whose parents sent her to clandestine Italian lessons (the language of the fascist occupiers) is praising the communist policies towards women's rights, that is a strong indication of their success.

Major Problems

Despite the great achievements of the communist government, there were nonetheless huge flaws which ultimately brought down the nation. These were:

1. The rigid anti-revisionism of Hoxha, who refused to allow any deviation from the Stalinist model, even when certain policies no longer made sense for current conditions.
2. The self-imposed isolation of the nation, as Hoxha burned bridges with other socialist nations that did not share his doctrinaire interpretation of Marxism.
3. The paranoia which resulted from this isolation, including the infamous bunker campaign, carried out to stave off a feared invasion from the USSR or Yugoslavia. On average, each bunker cost as many resources as a two-bedroom apartment, and the total resources devoted to building them could have easily resolved the nation's housing shortage.

These problems should serve as a warning to all subsequent generations of socialists and communists, as even the great achievements of socialism in Albania were not enough to prevent the above flaws from bringing everything down.

Conclusion

The People's Socialist Republic of Albania is a complicated case for us to analyze. The following assessment of the revolution is given by the LSE study:

Overall, how can we characterize communist Albania? Clearly, in spite of considerable economic development relative to its previous level, it remained poor and mostly rural. However, the social agenda of development made much more progress. Education and social security became virtually universal, and health care was available to all. Moreover, traditionally severe discrimination against women was greatly reduced.

Some achievements of the communists are acknowledged even by reactionaries:

The reduction of long-standing traditions of discrimination against women, and the provision of universal education and primary health-care were achievements which even the regime's enemies acknowledge.

The communists also greatly developed the nation's economy, developed its infrastructure, and liberated it from foreign domination. One of the best summations of the achievements of socialism in Albania is given by the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, in its [article](#) on Enver Hoxha:

Albania's economy was revolutionized under Hoxha's long rule. Farmland was confiscated from wealthy landowners and gathered into collective farms that eventually enabled Albania to become almost completely self-sufficient in food crops. Industry, which had previously been almost nonexistent, received huge amounts of investment, so that by the 1980's it had grown to contribute more than half of the gross national product. Electricity was brought to every rural district, epidemics of disease were stamped out, and illiteracy became a thing of the past.

Despite all of this, however, the flaws of isolationism and rigid-dogmatism prevented the nation from advancing post-1975, and ultimately brought about its fall. Let this serve as a warning: idealism and isolation are fatal to any revolution.

Sources

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Masterpost on the Hungarian People's Republic

Introduction

Continuing on with our series of masterposts about the Eastern Bloc, this time we'll be looking at the Hungarian People's Republic, one of the most interesting of the Warsaw Pact nations. It is also the nation with perhaps the fondest recollection among the people; polls in recent years have found upwards of 70% of Hungarians feel that life was better under communism

(see sources below). As such, it is fitting that we should study and learn more about this nation.

As always, all sources will be listed at the bottom, and I will indicate which source I am using whenever I quote from one.

Economic Development and Standard of Living

Prior to the establishment of the Hungarian People's Republic, Hungary was a semi-feudal nation, with very little industrial development and remarkably low quality-of-life. However, despite turbulent conditions, the socialist system still managed to rapidly develop Hungary's economy. According to the US Federal Research Division:

Despite war, depression, revolution, foreign occupation, and periods of near chaos, Hungary's economy has advanced in the twentieth century from a near-feudal state to a middle-level stage of industrial development.

The Encyclopedia Britannica notes:

Historically, prior to World War II, Hungary was mostly agrarian. Beginning in 1948, a forced industrialization policy based on the Soviet pattern changed the economic character of the country. A centrally-planned economy was introduced, and millions of new jobs were created in industry (notably for women) and, later, in services.

This is especially impressive when one considers the severe lack of natural resources facing the Hungarian economy, which forced them to depend almost entirely on Soviet imports. The US Federal Research Division states:

The country's general lack of raw materials has necessitated foreign trade, a concern that has dominated the economic policies of Hungarian governments since 1918, when the country lost much of the territory it held prior to World War I [...] The Soviet Union was Hungary's principal supplier of raw materials.

Immediately after the establishment of the Hungarian People's Republic, the nation instituted a traditional Soviet-style planned economy. However, in the late-1960's, an economic reform plan (known as the New Economic Mechanism, or NEM) was instituted, which somewhat restored the role of market forces, while retaining state ownership over the means of production, distribution, and exchange.

The 1960's saw the state focusing on expanding industry. According to the US Federal Research Division:

During the 1960's, the government gave high priority to expanding the industrial sector's engineering and chemical branches. Production of buses, machine tools, precision instruments, and telecommunications equipment received the most attention in the engineering sector. The chemical sector focused on artificial-fertilizer, plastic, and synthetic-fiber production. The Hungarian and Comecon markets were the government's primary targets, and the policies resulted in increased imports of energy, raw materials, and semi-finished goods.

After this period, the economy shifted focus towards consumer production with the introduction of the NEM:

By the mid-1960's, the government realized that the policy for industrial expansion it had followed since 1949 was no longer viable. Although the economy was growing steadily and the population's living standard was improving, key factors limited further growth... The government introduced the NEM in 1968 in order to improve enterprise efficiency and make its goods more competitive on world markets.

This time was marked by high rates of economic growth. Hungary reached the level of a middle-developed nation:

From 1968 to 1972, the NEM and a favorable economic environment contributed to good economic performance. The economy grew steadily, neither unemployment nor inflation was apparent, and the country's convertible-currency balance of payments was in equilibrium as exports to Western markets grew more rapidly than its imports. Cooperative farms and factories rapidly increased production of goods and services that were lacking before the reform. By about 1970, Hungary had reached the status of a medium-developed country. Its industry was producing 40 to 50 percent of the gross domestic product, while agriculture was contributing less than 20 percent.

By the mid-to-late 1980's, Hungary had achieved a very high standard of living compared to the pre-communist era. Food availability was high, and selection was relatively diverse. The US Federal Research Division reports:

In 1986 Hungary's per-capita meat consumption was the highest in Eastern Europe, while its egg consumption ranked among the highest. Per capita consumption of meat, fish, milk and dairy products, eggs, vegetables, potatoes, coffee, wine, beer, and hard liquor all increased significantly between 1950 and 1984.

Hungarians also had high rates of ownership for various consumer goods, and the quality of goods was increasing as well:

By 1984, 96 out of 100 households owned a washing machine, every household owned a refrigerator, and the ratio of television sets to households was 108 to 100. The quality and variety of durable consumer goods on sale had also improved.

Despite these good statistics, the Hungarian economy was not free from problems; an over-reliance on Stalinist orthodoxy (particularly in the early years) caused Hungary to lean heavily on the development of heavy industry, ignoring other forms of production which would have better suited the nation's material conditions. In addition, the country's enterprises and farms suffered from low levels of relative productivity, which contributed to a slowing of growth in the 1980's. The Encyclopedia Britannica summarizes these issues:

Although Soviet-type economic modernization generated rapid growth, it was based on an early 20th-century structural pattern and on outdated technology. The heavy industries of iron, steel, and engineering were given the highest priority, while modern infrastructure services, and communication were neglected. New technologies and high-tech industries were underdeveloped and further hampered by Western restrictions (the Coordinating Committee for Multilateral Export Controls) on the export of modern technology to the Soviet bloc.

Finally, in 1982, Hungary became the second Eastern Bloc nation to join the IMF. This was a tremendous mistake, as various loan conditions during the 1980's eventually contributed to the collapse of the socialist system, and its replacement with a brutal strain of capitalism. Overall, the Hungarian economy offers several lessons for modern socialists and communists:

1. Economic development should focus on the comparative advantage of a given nation, rather than dogmatic dependence on heavy industry.
2. The production of consumer goods and an increasing standard of living are essential for winning (and keeping) the support of the people.
3. The socialist economic system, when properly directed, is indeed capable of transforming semi-feudal states into developed countries. The other Eastern Bloc nations (along with China) prove this as well.

Healthcare and Social Welfare

Healthcare in pre-communist Hungary was of low quality, and the population suffered from poor health and low life-expectancy. However, after the establishment of the Hungarian People's Republic, healthcare conditions began to improve significantly. The US Federal Research Division reports:

After the communist government assumed power in Hungary, it devoted much attention to meeting the specific health care and social security needs of the population. In comparison with pre-war

standards, the average citizen received far better health care and social assistance as a result of the government's policy.

The Encyclopedia Britannica notes:

Following World War II, health care improved dramatically under state socialism, with significant increases in the number of physicians and hospital beds in Hungary. By the 1970's, free healthcare was guaranteed to every citizen.

The social welfare system was also improved significantly, providing coverage to the vast majority of working people in Hungary. The US Federal Research Division notes: In the late 1980's, the country's pension system covered about 85 percent of the population falling within pensionable ages. Male workers could qualify for pensions at the age of sixty, female workers at the age of fifty-five.

These advances are confirmed by the Encyclopedia Britannica:

A broad range of social services was provided by the communist government, including child support, extensive maternity leave, and an old-age pension system for which men became eligible at age 60 and women at age 55.

However, these improvements in social welfare came with a strange downside. As people began to live longer, and access to social welfare was expanded, the system was placed under more strain. The US Federal Research Division states:

The number of pensioners had increased rapidly since the end of World War II as people lived longer and as pension coverage expanded to include additional segments of the population.

In addition, various social ills, such as alcoholism, had begun to pose a problem for public health:

In the mid-1980's, the authorities were also discussing the growing incidence of substance abuse. The incidence of alcoholism had increased during the previous generation, and a high percentage of suicide victims were alcoholics. As of 1986, consumption of alcohol per person per year was 11.7 liters; consumption of hard liquor (4.8 liters per person) was the second highest in the world.

To compound these issues, the Hungarian government spent a worryingly low percentage of GNP on healthcare:

Western analysts estimated that Hungary spent only 3.3 percent of its gross national product specifically on health service (the 6 percent figure listed in most statistical data actually included

some social services). This percentage was the lowest of any East European country except Romania (in comparison, the United States spent 11 percent of GNP on health care).

Despite these problems, the socialist system in Hungary objectively provided clear benefits to the people in terms of healthcare and social welfare. There are a number of important lessons that we can learn from the Hungarian experience:

1. It is essential that the proper resources be dedicated to healthcare and social welfare. Austerity benefits nobody on these issues, because the resulting decline in quality and availability will lead to instability and unrest, not to mention a reduction in living standards. The dictatorship of the proletariat must put the needs and interests of the proletariat as a top priority; otherwise, what's the point?
2. It is also essential that a socialist government should take steps to resolve social problems such as alcoholism and drug addiction, which contributed massively to declining health throughout the Eastern Bloc in the 1970's and 1980's. The importance of these issues can be seen by contrasting the Eastern Bloc with other socialist nations, such as Cuba, which does not have such widespread substance abuse issues, and which has seen steady and stable improvements in health outcomes for decades (even during the "special period" following the fall of the USSR).
3. Despite these factors, the socialist system in Hungary did manage to vastly improve the health of the population, as well as working people's access to social welfare. These improvements should not be ignored.

Educational Achievements

Pre-communist Hungary had a highly elitist educational system, largely dominated by religious institutions. The US Federal Research Division reports:

Before the communist assumption of power in 1947, religion was the primary influence on education... The social and material status of students strongly influenced the type and extent of schooling they received. Education above the elementary level was generally available only to the social elite of the country. In secondary and higher-level schools, a mere 5 percent of the students came from worker or peasant families. Only about 1 or 2 percent of all students entered higher education.

However, after the Communists came to power, the educational system was drastically reformed. The Encyclopedia Britannica notes:

All this changed after the communist takeover of Hungary following World War II. In 1948 schools were nationalized, and the elitist German style of education was replaced by a Soviet-style mass education, consisting of eight years of general school and four years of secondary education. The latter consisted of college-preparatory high schools that approximated the upper four years of the gimnázium as well as of the more numerous and diverse vocational schools (technikumok) that prepared students for technical colleges or universities but in most instances simply led directly to mid-level jobs.

The educational system was greatly expanded. The US Federal Research Division states:

Attendance at school was mandatory from age six to sixteen. All students attended general schools for at least eight years. Tuition was free for all students from age six up to the university level. Most students actually began their schooling at five years of age; in 1986 approximately 92 percent of all children of kindergarten age attended one of the country's 4,804 kindergartens. By 1980 every town and two-thirds of the villages had kindergartens. Parents paid a fee for preschool services that was based on income, but such institutions were heavily subsidized by the local councils or enterprises that sponsored them.

These reforms succeeded in drastically expanding the educational standards throughout Hungary:

By 1980 only 29 percent of males aged fifteen years or older and 38 percent of females aged fifteen years and older had not completed eight years of general school, compared with 78 percent of such males and 80 percent of such females in 1949. About half of the students who completed the general schools subsequently completed their education in two years, through vocational and technical training. The remaining students continued their studies in a four-year gymnasium or trade school.

However, the system suffered from similar problems to the healthcare and social welfare systems. Specifically, it was underfunded; Hungary spent a very low percentage of GNP on education compared to other nations, which resulted in shortages:

Critics noted, among other things, that although Switzerland spent 18.8 percent of its national budget on education, Brazil 18.4 percent, and Japan 19.2 percent, Hungary allotted only 6.6 percent of its state budget to education. In the 1980's, the country experienced shortages of both classrooms and teachers, so that primary- school classes sometimes contained up to forty children. In many areas, schools had alternate morning and afternoon school shifts in order to stretch facilities and staff. Moreover, not all teachers received proper training.

Thus, the major lesson that we can learn from the Hungarian People's Republic in this field is that education must be properly funded, in order to ensure that all people are able to access

education of sufficient quality. It is essential that sufficient supplies be made available, as well as funding to hire and train sufficient staff.

Post-Communist Nostalgia in Hungary

Despite the issues of the Hungarian People's Republic, many people in Hungary have since found themselves longing for the return of the socialist system. A poll conducted by Pew Research Center found the following:

A remarkable 72% of Hungarians say that most people in their country are actually worse off today economically than they were under communism. Only 8% say most people in Hungary are better off, and 16% say things are about the same.

Even reactionary news sources have been unable to ignore the favorable opinion that many Hungarians have of the old socialist system. The *Daily Mail* (one of the most hard-line right-wing papers in Britain) published an article by a woman from Hungary, which made some interesting statements:

When people ask me what it was like growing up behind the Iron Curtain in Hungary in the Seventies and Eighties, most expect to hear tales of secret police, bread queues and other nasty manifestations of life in a one-party state.

They are invariably disappointed when I explain that the reality was quite different, and communist Hungary, far from being hell on earth, was in fact, rather a fun place to live. The communists provided everyone with guaranteed employment, good education and free healthcare. Violent crime was virtually non-existent.

The author notes that cultural life was expanded to include all Hungarians, not only the upper-classes:

Culture was regarded as extremely important by the government. The communists did not want to restrict the finer things of life to the upper and middle classes - the very best of music, literature and dance were for all to enjoy.

This meant lavish subsidies were given to institutions including orchestras, opera houses, theaters and cinemas. Ticket prices were subsidized by the State, making visits to the opera and theater affordable.

'Cultural houses' were opened in every town and village, so provincial, working-class people such as my parents could have easy access to the performing arts, and to the best performers. She notes that advertising and consumerist culture was virtually nonexistent in Hungary:

Although we lived well under 'goulash communism' and there was always enough food for us to eat, we were not bombarded with advertising for products we didn't need.

She laments that the perspectives of ordinary working-class people from the Eastern Bloc are typically ignored by the West:

When communism in Hungary ended in 1989, I was not only surprised, but saddened, as were many others. Yes, there were people marching against the government, but the majority of ordinary people - me and my family included - did not take part in the protests.

Our voice - the voice of those whose lives were improved by communism - is seldom heard when it comes to discussions of what life was like behind the Iron Curtain.

Instead, the accounts we hear in the West are nearly always from the perspectives of wealthy emigres or anti-communist dissidents with an axe to grind.

Finally, she notes that the losses of the post-communist era have vastly exceeded any potential gains:

People no longer have job security. Poverty and crime is on the increase. Working-class people can no longer afford to go to the opera or theater. As in Britain, TV has dumbed down to a worrying degree - ironically, we never had Big Brother under communism, but we have it today.

Most sadly of all, the spirit of camaraderie that we once enjoyed has all but disappeared. In the past two decades we may have gained shopping malls, multi-party 'democracy', mobile phones and the internet. But we have lost a whole lot more.

By actually listening to the accounts of people who lived under socialism, as well as examining the polls, we can see what the working-class truly feel about socialism, as well as the ruthless capitalism that succeeded it.

Conclusion

The Hungarian People's Republic was an interesting nation, which had a number of flaws, but nonetheless provided a high standard of living to its people. It is fondly remembered by those who lived under it, and its achievements, though generally ignored in the West, should not go unnoticed by anybody claiming to be a socialist or a communist. We must study Hungary (along with all other socialist nations) in order to learn the important lessons that it has to offer.

Sources

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Masterpost on the Polish People's Republic

Introduction

The Polish People's Republic was a complex nation, with a fraught political history. The nation was plagued by internal contradictions and conflicts, due to several factors, including the prevalent influence of the Catholic Church, and the fact that there had never been a true socialist revolution in Poland; rather, the PPR was established by means of external influence from the USSR. Despite this, the PPR had a number of impressive achievements, which should be celebrated.

All sources are at the bottom. I will indicate which source I am using when I quote.

Economic and Industrial Development

Prior to WWII, Poland had been lagging behind the rest of Europe in terms of industrial development. To make matters worse, WWII had utterly devastated the country's cities and economic centers, leaving the economy in ruins. According to the 1948 United Nations Statistical Yearbook, Poland's industrial output in 1945 was only 48% of what it had been in 1938 (pg. 126). This reflects the damage done to the Polish economy by WWII.

After the socialist system was in place, the economy began to grow rapidly. The 1948 UN Statistical Yearbook shows that Poland's industrial output in 1948 was already 153% of what it had been in 1938 (pg. 126). This means that industrial output grew more than 300% from 1945 to 1948 (combining post-war recovery with the introduction of the socialist system).

This growth continued for several decades. The 1978 UN Statistical Yearbook shows that industrial output in 1977 was 193% of what it had been in 1971, compared to only 44% in 1960 (pg. 168). This comes out to an almost 500% increase in industrial output between 1960 and 1977 (more than doubling between 1960 and 1970, then increasing by 93% from there). This demonstrates the immense productivity of the socialist system.

Healthcare Achievements

Before the Communists took over, Poland was a terribly unhealthy nation. According to the University of Bath (one of the top-ranked research universities in Great Britain):

Before World War II (WWII) Poland was one of the countries with the poorest health in Europe. In the 1930's life expectancy in Poland was around 46 years for both sexes; in the same period in Germany it was over 61 years. Infant mortality was estimated at the level of 150 deaths per 1000 live births. The situation was exacerbated by WWII; between 1939 and 1945 life expectancy in Poland fell by 20-25 years.

These statistics are verified in the 1948 UN Statistical Yearbook (pg. 58), which included data from 1931 onwards, reflecting the poor healthcare conditions in pre-communist Poland. Once the socialist system was in place, things began to improve rapidly. According to the University of Bath:

The health transformation that took place in Poland after WWII proceeded very rapidly. Control of infectious diseases and infant mortality became a state priority in the post-war Polish People's Republic... Life expectancy in Poland increased to 70 years and infant mortality decreased to 30 deaths per 1000 live births.

Thus, we can see that life expectancy was increased by decades, and infant mortality fell by eighty percent. These changes (and similar ones in other socialist nations) led to Central and Eastern Europe nearly closing the healthcare gap with Western Europe, which had been so pronounced before socialism:

The epidemiological transition that in the United Kingdom or Germany took almost a century, in Poland, and many other Central and East European (CEE) countries, occurred in the two decades following WWII. This process led the CEE region to almost closing the health gap dividing it from Western Europe in the 1960's.

On the downside, the Polish People's Republic saw rapidly increasing consumption of alcohol and cigarettes, which led to increased rates of preventable death. This problem also occurred in other nations in the Soviet bloc:

In Poland the consumption of vodka and smoking prevalence reached some of the highest levels in Europe. This dramatic increase in exposure to lifestyle risk factors (an increase in cigarette sale from 20 billion cigarettes per annum after WWII to around 100 billion in the 1980's, and an increase of alcohol consumption from 3 liters per annum to nearly 9 liters in the same period), led Poland and the CEE region to a health catastrophe caused by the rise of chronic diseases.

Despite these problems (which were not the result of socialism, but rather of excessive drinking and smoking), the healthcare achievements of the Polish People's Republic remain impressive.

Educational Achievements

Pre-communist Poland saw widespread illiteracy and lack of education. According to a 1935 article from the Polish magazine *New Courier* (not to be confused with *New Courier of Warsaw*, a Nazi propaganda outlet founded in 1939):

In Polesie in the Kobrin powiat, less than 75 percent write and read in towns, and only 52% in the countryside. In Kosowski powiat, 82% in small towns, and 43% in rural areas. In the Koszalin powiat, where there are no cities, there are only 30 percent who can read and write.

Polesie is in fact one of the areas of the Commonwealth that is economically and culturally neglected, but, it should be remembered, not the most neglected. Unfortunately, data from the poviats of the Warsaw Province, i.e. from economically quite high standing and in orbit of the capital's influence, show that the condition is not much better there either. In the Płońsk powiat, 73% write and read in cities. population, 68% in the countryside 77 percent in Sierpc and 68 percent in Ciechanów 80% (cities) and 70% (village).

Census statistics are current today just as much as they were three years ago. And the figures of this statistic are not only dangerous, they are terrifying.

After the communist takeover, the educational system was drastically improved. The level of illiteracy was drastically reduced. According to the Polish Encyclopedia published by PWN (the top publisher of scientific and scholarly reference works in Poland):

As early as 1960, the census showed 645,000 total illiterates and 270,000 semi-illiterates among those over 50. In 1988, the illiteracy rate in Poland was 2%.

While PWN places the pre-communist literacy rates a bit higher than the *New Courier*, we can still see the drastic improvement to the educational situation made under the communists, particularly in rural areas.

Women's Rights

Women made major gains in the Polish People's Republic. Reproductive rights and abortion are a major example of this. Prior to the communist era, abortion was only legal in cases of criminal sexual activity. According to the *Brown Political Review*:

At the beginning of the 20th century, abortion was illegal under any circumstance in Poland. But in 1932, Poland enacted a code that legalized abortion in the cases of a criminal act, namely rape, incest, and underage sex. This was the first abortion law that condoned abortion in the case of a crime. The law remained on the books from 1932 until 1956.

However, it was only in the communist era that abortion became completely legal, as well as freely available:

In 1956, the Polish Sejm (the lower house of parliament), in keeping with Communist Party orthodoxy, legalized abortions when women expressed "difficult leaving conditions". During the 60's and 70's, abortion became freely available in both public hospitals and private clinics. While the Soviet system encouraged mothers to carry the child to term, the law left it to physicians to decide whether abortion should be performed and largely guaranteed easy access to the operation.

Even reactionary commentators acknowledged the gender equality of the communist era. According to the *Guardian*:

Stamped into the DNA of this society, from the postwar years until 1991, was that everyone had to work; for that, there had to be equal access to education, childcare (which was mainly attached to workplaces) and care for the elderly.

Employment for women was extremely high in the communist era, and it fell drastically afterwards:

Throughout the communist years female workforce participation was incredibly high, often cited at 90%... As communism collapsed, participation fell to 68% and it now stands at 45%.

One Polish woman is quoted as saying:

"The regime made absolutely no distinction between men and women. I never even thought about the division – all advance in society was open to men and women equally.

"As far as education is concerned it was absolutely equal, to the extent that at the technical universities – the very high-standard engineering universities – I think 30% of students were women" (this was in the 1960's – engineering courses at Imperial College London still have a male to female ratio of 5:1 today).

Keep in mind that this *Guardian* article is written from a firmly anti-communist perspective, and even still it acknowledges that the "end of communism in Poland hasn't helped Polish women." This demonstrates the improvements in women's rights made under the communists.

Conclusion

The Polish People's Republic was hardly a flawless nation. It had numerous internal conflicts, due to the reactionary social influence of the church, as well as the fact that Poland's socialism did not originate with an internal revolution, but rather with external Soviet influence. Still, socialism in Poland managed to greatly improve the health of the population, develop the economy at a rapid pace, and greatly improve the education system.

In short comrades, we should learn a few key lessons from the Polish People's Republic:

1. Revolution must be autonomous, and come from the people themselves; liberation cannot be imposed, or it will become distorted.
2. Even in such non-ideal conditions, socialism is capable of providing superior economic development and quality of life when compared to capitalism.
3. It is essential that a revolution should focus on expunging reactionary elements from the national culture, to avoid a similar situation to Poland, where the Catholic Church largely controlled the social sphere. However, we must also avoid going too far in this, and persecuting religion and religious people. The revolution has no quarrel with people's personal beliefs; it is reactionary religious institutions (such as the Catholic Church) which must be opposed.

These are lessons which must be learned.

Sources

- [University of Bath | Health in the Polish People's Republic](#)
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- [PWN Encyclopedia | Illiteracy](#)
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Masterpost on the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia

Introduction

The Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was a key player in 20th century geopolitics, yet many people in the West know remarkably little about it. Socialists and non-socialists alike are often extremely uneducated about this particular country, and its various achievements; often all that is known is that it was led by Tito, one of the most popular heads of state in the 20th century. While this is a useful piece of information, it is hardly a sufficient socialist analysis of this great nation. Let us thus examine Yugoslavia in detail, and make a proper analysis.

All sources are included at the end, to avoid scattering links throughout the post. Whenever I quote from one of these sources, I will indicate which source I am referencing, so that you can check the original if you would like to.

Summary

The University of Rochester gives the following overall assessment of the communist era in Yugoslavia:

The history of Yugoslavia since 1945 embraces a period of rapid economic, political, and social modernization reflected in urban and industrial growth, improvements in literacy and economic well-being, changes in the traditional patriarchal family structure, moderation of ethnic hostilities, and integration into the international economy. However, in dialectical fashion, it also embraces a period of economic decline and intense ethnic reaction. In a very real sense, the route to the collapse of the Yugoslav federation, like the collapse of the Soviet federation, was paved by the policy toward nationalities that each had pursued, but it was precipitated by involvement in the global economy.

Now that we have a brief impression of the rise and fall of the nation, let us go into a bit more detail.

A Brief Look at Pre-War Yugoslavia

In order to understand the achievements of socialism in Yugoslavia, we must first understand what conditions were like *before* socialism. The University of Rochester gives this assessment of pre-war Yugoslavia:

The country remained largely undeveloped throughout the interwar years. Seventy-seven percent of the population were peasants. Illiteracy rates of those older than 10 ranged between 83.8% in Macedonia and 8.8% in Slovenia, with the national figure being 51.5% in 1921. Mortality and fertility were both high, epidemics were common despite innovative programs created by Andrija Stampar, the Croatian public health leader, and the government was ineffective in providing preventive and curative health services as well as needed infrastructure. High taxes and declining agricultural prices during the depression years of the 1930's may have contributed to the peasants' hostility to the government and to their support for the Partisans during World War II, which was as much a civil war as a war against the German invaders.

According to the Helsinki Committee:

The overall social development of Yugoslavia from 1918 to 1941 was overwhelmingly slow, so that the country was at the lower end of European trends (population poverty, illiteracy, low level of health culture, poor mobility, etc.), with a rather closed perspective... In the inter-war period, the housing infrastructure outside cities was either poor or non-existent, lacking electricity, water and sewage connections. Living conditions in municipal workers' or peripheral settlements were poor.

In short, pre-war Yugoslavia was an economically underdeveloped nation, plagued by high levels of illiteracy, high mortality rates, low life expectancy, and epidemics of disease. Now that

we understand a bit more about the state of things when the communists took over, let us now look at what they made of this situation.

Economic and Infrastructure Development

Before WWII (and the communist takeover), the economy in Yugoslavia was stagnant. According to the Helsinki Committee:

From 1921 to the outbreak of World War II, the country was not characterized by any exceptional economic progress. In that, however, it was no different from the majority of neighboring countries, whether it be, for example, Greece, Hungary or Bulgaria. Partly this was the consequence of demographic growth, but since we are talking about several decades, it is clear that on the whole the economy was stagnant and that it is not possible to talk about any significant progress in relation to economic development on Yugoslav territory in the time before the establishment of the common state.

After the communist takeover, a new economic system was set up, based on workers' self-management within state-owned enterprises. This system is described by the *Encyclopedia Britannica* in their article on Yugoslavia:

After 1945 the communist government nationalized large landholdings, industrial enterprises, public utilities, and other resources and launched a strenuous process of industrialization. After a split with the Soviet Union in 1948, Yugoslavia had by the 1960's come to place greater reliance on market mechanisms. A distinctive feature of this new "Yugoslav system" was "workers' self-management" which reached its fullest form in the 1976 Law on Associated Labour. Under this law, individuals participated in Yugoslav enterprise management through the work organizations into which they were divided. Work organizations might be either "Basic Organizations of Associated Labour" (the subdivisions of a single enterprise) or "Complex Organizations of Associated Labour" uniting different segments of an overall activity (e.g., manufacture and distribution). Each work organization was governed by a workers' council, which elected a board of management to run the enterprise.

This system led to dramatic economic growth. According to the Helsinki Committee:

Development in the years after World War II, if we put aside the years of the Soviet blockade, is characterized by significant economic growth and development, if the latter is expressed, again, by the per capita GDP. While in the first twenty years or so the GDP per capita increased just under 40 percent, in the period from 1952 to 1979 it increased just under 5 times. As in both cases it was a matter of rebuilding the country after great war devastation, there is no doubt that Yugoslavia after World War II achieved an incomparably better economic development than it did after World War I.

The country underwent a great process of urbanization under the communists:

A great wave of urbanization took place in the second half of the century when settlements with larger residential buildings and skyscrapers were built. New cities or larger urban complexes, such as New Belgrade, New Zagreb, New Gorica, Velenje and Split 3, were also built. From the aspect of urban planning, the reconstruction of Skopje after the disastrous earthquake of 1963 was especially successful. These new settlements were based on contemporary urban planning and architectural concepts such as residential buildings with social amenities, surrounded by green areas and having no direct access to major roads. Kindergartens and schools, parks, health centers, trading and small-scale craft facilities were also built according to plan.

The dismal housing situation was improved dramatically, as was access to essential services (electricity, water, sanitation, etc.):

Each year, from the early 1960's through the 1980's, 100–150 thousand apartments were built and one third of them was built by the socially-owned sector. These apartments were given to workers on the basis of their occupancy right acquired in the enterprises and institutions where they were employed. A survey shows that in the years of peak housing construction, that is, during the late 1970's and early 1980's, all three-member worker households had electricity, almost all of them had water and sewage connections, one third had central heating and eight out of ten had a bathroom and toilet in the apartment.

Unfortunately, the Yugoslav economy eventually began to stagnate, a problem which was made worse by the interference of the IMF, as well as the inflamed regional tensions which resurfaced after the death of Tito. According to the *Encyclopedia Britannica*:

Inflation and unemployment emerged as serious problems, particularly during the 1980's, and productivity remained low. Such defects in the system were patched over by massive and uncoordinated foreign borrowing, but after 1983 the International Monetary Fund demanded extensive economic restructuring as a precondition for further support. The conflict over how to meet this demand resurrected old animosities between the wealthier northern and western regions, which were required to contribute funds to federally administered development programs, and the poorer southern and eastern regions, where these funds were frequently invested in relatively inefficient enterprises or in unproductive prestige projects. Such differences contributed directly to the disintegration of the second Yugoslavia.

Despite this, the rapid economic growth generated by the socialist system in Yugoslavia remains impressive, and its eventual fall serves a warning about the terrible dangers of relying excessively on foreign investment, especially from bourgeois institutions.

Healthcare Achievements

Pre-war Yugoslavia was beset by terrible healthcare conditions, a situation which was only made worse by WWII. According to the Helsinki Committee:

As regards the health care of the population in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, it was at the lowest level according to the European standards. According to 1930 data, there were 12,204 medical personnel members, including 4,545 doctors and 208 dentists. There were also 172 hospitals and 22,895 hospital beds. In Yugoslavia up to 1939, there were 18,193 medical personnel members, including 5,131 doctors and 380 dentists, implying that there was one doctor per 3,060 inhabitants and one dentist per 41,324 inhabitants. Of this number of doctors, 927 worked in 169 hospitals with 23,534 beds (only 429 more than twenty or so years earlier).

As a result, the communists made the provision of healthcare a key aspect of their policy. According to NYU:

Health policy in the former Yugoslavia was based on the promise of growth: expansion of existing health facilities and construction of new ones, an increase in the supply of health care workers and drugs and, ultimately, an improvement in health status. The promise was repeated so often that people came to consider such social benefits "to be their natural due," a major premise of socialism.

This resulted in enormous increases in the health conditions of the country:

By 1978, the number of hospital beds, in comparison to 1939, tripled from 19 to 60 beds per 10,000 population; the number of medical schools rose from three to eleven, resulting in a five-fold increase in the number of physicians; and health insurance was extended to cover 82 percent of the population. The infant mortality rate of 35.6 per 1,000 population in 1978 was only one-fourth of the pre-World War II figure. Moreover, diphtheria, malaria and typhus had been eliminated.

These improvements are also discussed by the Helsinki Committee:

In socialist Yugoslavia, the situation radically improved. Up to 1950, there were only 5,138 doctors and 196 dentists, while already in 1952 there were 6,548 doctors (since the first generations of post-war medical students had graduated), while the number of dentists decreased to 184. Until 1987, the Yugoslav population was treated by 43,869 doctors and 9,232 dentists, which means that there was one doctor per 533 inhabitants and one dentist per 2,535 inhabitants. In 1950, compared to 1939, the number of hospital beds increased more than twofold – there were 53,760 hospital beds. By 1960, this number had also increased more than

twofold, so that there were 102,329 hospital beds, while until 1988 this number increased to 142,957.

Healthcare access was expanded across the entire country:

In addition, thanks to the development of the road network, better communications and different social policy, health care became accessible to a significantly greater number of people. Apart from doctors, the number of other medical personnel also increased. According to the 1962 data, there was a total of 112,946 medical workers; in 1975 – 193,374, and in 1987 – 303,105... Understandably, the most advanced medical services were provided in urban centers, but spa rehabilitation centers were being developed and basic health care also reached rural areas. Until 1989, in addition to hospitals, 8,384 general and specialist medical centers and 4,425 dental surgeries were opened.

Infant and child mortality were significantly reduced:

The improvement of state-sponsored social care for the population also resulted in a great decline of infant and child mortality rates due to which the Kingdom of Yugoslavia had ranked among the most backward European countries.

Life expectancy was increased dramatically:

Life expectancy was also significantly increasing. In 1931, the life expectancy for females and males was 46.1 and 45.1 years respectively. Already in 1948, the life expectancy levels had increased to 53 years for females and 48.6 years for males... Up to 1981, the life expectancy at the Yugoslav level increased to 73.2 for females and 67.7 for males. Its increase continued, so that in 1990 the expected life expectancy for females in Yugoslavia was 74.9 and for males 69.1 years, whereby regional differences were reduced.

The mortality rate declined rapidly under the communists; eventually, mortality rates in Yugoslavia became lower than those in Western Europe:

Finally, the mortality rate also declined: from 21 deaths per 1,000 inhabitants in 1921 to 15 deaths per 1,000 inhabitants until 1939. After 1945, the mortality rate continued to decline from the maximum 14.2 deaths per 1,000 inhabitants to the minimum 8.1 deaths per 1,000 inhabitants in 1966. At the end of the observation period, the mortality rate was 9 deaths per 1,000 inhabitants, thus being lower than in Germany (9.2), France (9.3) or Britain (11.2). Note that although there had been some reduction in the mortality rate under the pre-communist government, the improvement was much faster under the communists, and it coincided with drastic improvements to infant mortality and life expectancy when compared to the pre-communist period.

To summarize, the Helsinki Committee says:

Nutrition and hygiene greatly influenced the health of the population... The post-war development of medicine and health institutions made possible a greater availability of doctors and an almost five-fold increase in the number of hospital beds (in 1986 there were about 143,000), while all services were covered by mandatory health insurance. Regular medical check-ups and mandatory vaccination of the population were also organised. Occupational medicine and an occupational safety system provided greater security for the employed. Pensions and homes for the elderly instilled confidence in end-of-life care. Thanks to better health and hygiene as well as improved socio-economic conditions, the estimated life expectancy for those born in the early 1980's was 68 years for men and 73 for women, that is, twenty or so years longer than that for the generations born in the 1940's. For the same reasons, infant mortality declined from 143 per thousand in the 1930's to 27 per thousand in the mid-1980's, ranging from 12.6 per thousand in Slovenia to 54.3 per thousand in Kosovo. The overall advances made by the communist government in Yugoslavia are remarkable.

Educational Achievements

Another area in which the communists dramatically improved Yugoslavia is that of education. Pre-war Yugoslavia was extremely backwards with regards to education. According to the Helsinki Committee:

In the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, despite specific efforts to raise the educational level of the population, no significant breakthroughs in this field were made. In 1921, the number of illiterate persons older than 10 years was even 4,402,059 (50.5 percent of the population), while by the 1931 census their number had increased to 4,408,471 (44.6 percent of the population older than 10 years).

After the communists took over during WWII, the situation rapidly and dramatically improved: According to the 1948 census already, this number was considerably smaller – 3,162,941 (25.4 percent of the population). This decrease was the result of a mass literacy campaign during the war and in its aftermath... considerable efforts were made towards educating the population, so that the number of illiterate persons older than 10 years continually declined, accompanied by an increase in the total population, so that in 1961 there were 3,066,165 (21 percent) such persons; in 1971 – 2,549,571 (15.1 percent) and in 1981 – 1,780,902 (9.5 percent). Of this number 1,576,238 were aged over 39 or, in other words, born before 1945.

Access to education was drastically expanded by the communists:

After 1945, the educational network expanded rapidly, both in terms of the number of schools and in terms of teaching diversity, while the number of compulsory years of elementary education increased and in 1958 compulsory eight-year elementary education was introduced. In the territory of Yugoslavia in 1946, there were 10,666 elementary schools with 1,441,679 students and 23,270 teachers which, considering the number of teachers, was a big decline compared to 1939. By 1975/78, the number of elementary schools in Yugoslavia had grown to 13,442, but after that it started to decline, mostly due to the merger of smaller schools, which was made possible thanks to improved transport and greater student mobility.

In short, the educational situation in Yugoslavia was dramatically improved during the socialist period, with a drastic reduction in illiteracy and a massive expansion in the educational network across the country.

Women's Rights in Yugoslavia

Pre-war Yugoslavia held a strongly reactionary view of women's rights, which was rapidly changed in the socialist period. According to the Helsinki Committee:

Women's emancipation in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was the result of individual efforts, while in socialist Yugoslavia it was the result of an organized policy. Although a feminist movement existed in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, it remained on the margins of social influence, while the status of women was best expressed in the Civil Code under which a married woman was denied legal capacity. This anachronous legal provision was abolished as early as 1946, with termination of the validity of the Civil Code.

The communists actively promoted women's emancipation:

Women understandably obtained the right to vote, marital relations were liberalized, the political activism of women was promoted through the Anti-Fascist Womens' Front and other mass organizations, and women were increasingly assuming social and political functions, while the legal solutions in all spheres of life tried to ensure gender equality. A considerable increase in the number of divorces can also be considered an expression of women's emancipation.

Women's educational access improved dramatically:

At literacy courses conducted during the period 1948–1950 as much as 70 percent of attendees were women, although the literacy and schooling of female children met with resistance in conservative environments, mostly for religious and patriarchal reasons. From 1921 to 1981, the percentage of illiterate women declined from 60 percent to 14.7 percent.

Women were integrated into the economy, from which they had previously been largely excluded:

After 1945, the share of the male population in the economically active population was decreasing, while the rate of the economically active population within the female population was relatively stable and ranged from 30.7 percent to 35.1 percent. This means that the absolute number of the economically active female population (and thus the share of the economically active population) was increasing in proportion to an increase in the share of the female population in the total population. However, this was not the case with the male population. This is a very credible testimony to women's emancipation compared to the prewar period, which was especially evident after 1961.

The communists thus made a number of enormous improvements to the status of women's rights in Yugoslavia.

Conclusion

The communists in Yugoslavia succeeded in drastically improving life for the people. The economy was greatly developed, infrastructure was expanded dramatically, and social policy was greatly advanced. The socialist era was a time of tremendous improvement and hope for the people. As the Helsinki Committee puts it:

This picture of the increase in the standard of living will become more complete if one takes into account the achieved level of technological development, high health and hygiene standards and higher educational level of the population. Should the question of progress be posed from the aspect of everyday life, it would be reflected in the wish for electricity, paved roads, a comfortable apartment or house, a marriage of love and not an arranged marriage, fertile land, job security, as well as the wish for the children to be better off in the future. It is precisely these issues that are conversation topics in the prize-winning feature film *Train Without a Timetable* (Veljko Bulajić, 1959): "There is also electricity and a state road over there, and you can have a radio in the house. It can play and sing for you all day long! Just like in a dream..." This dream was part of the changes brought by the 20th century to everyday life, including increased opportunities and needs. Yugoslavia was attuning the rhythm of the century to its own development level and political priorities.

That's something which we can all appreciate.

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Essays on America

The Kafkaesque Nightmare of American Healthcare

Introduction

By now, most people are aware that the American healthcare system is among the most dysfunctional institutions imaginable, with the highest costs in the world, and some of the worst outcomes of any advanced country. That being said, there are still those who deny the necessity of completely overhauling the system, and as such, it is useful to take some time and go over the essential facts of the matter. As always, all sources will be listed at the end.

America's Poor Health Outcomes

The USA ranks near the bottom of the developed world in most essential health outcomes. A 2020 [paper](#) from the American College of Physicians (published in the *Annals of Internal Medicine*) reports that "despite higher spending, the United States generally has less favorable outcomes than other countries." Let's take infant mortality, for example. According to a 2016 [study](#) from the American Economic Association:

The United States has higher infant mortality than peer countries... The US disadvantage persists after adjusting for potential differential reporting of births near the threshold of viability.

The ACP paper confirms that America's poor infant mortality ranking persists "even after adjustment for reporting differences." According to the AEA, this subpar performance "is driven by poor birth outcomes among lower socioeconomic status individuals." As if this wasn't bad enough, maternal mortality is also shockingly high in the USA. According to an [article](#) from NPR (reporting on data from the CDC):

More American women are dying of pregnancy-related complications than any other developed country. Only in the U.S. has the rate of women who die been rising.

To make matters worse, there is evidence that the official statistics actually leave out a great number of deaths, meaning that the actual rate is probably much higher. According to an [article](#) from ProPublica, "the new rate, while capturing just how poorly the U.S. ranks among other countries, is actually a significant underestimate of the problem." This only makes the issue even more horrifying.

In addition, healthcare-amenable mortality is generally higher in the United States than in peer countries. According to the American College of Physicians:

The United States has a higher mortality rate for medical conditions for which there are recognized health care interventions than Germany, the Netherlands, Japan, France, and Australia.

A 2017 [study](#) in the *Lancet* looked at global amenable mortality, finding that the United States ranked 35th in the world in overall performance. In a [press release](#) following the publication of the paper, Dr. Christopher Murray (the study's lead author) said the following:

What we have found about health care access and quality is disturbing. Having a strong economy does not guarantee good health care. Having great medical technology doesn't either. We know this because people are not getting the care that should be expected for diseases with established treatment. [...] America's ranking is an embarrassment, especially considering the US spends more than \$9,000 per person on health care annually, more than any other country. Anyone with a stake in the current health care debate, including elected officials at the federal, state, and local levels, should take a look at where the US is falling short.

While many people acclaim the US health system for its advanced technology, it is clear that this does no good if people cannot actually access the care they need. All-in-all, it's clear that outcomes in the American healthcare system are extremely subpar, especially when one takes into account the ludicrously high cost. On that note, let's discuss cost and expenditures.

Cost and Expenditures in the American Healthcare System

The United States spends more per-capita on healthcare than any other country on Earth.

According to the aforementioned [study](#) from the American College of Physicians:

The United States spends far more per capita on health care than other wealthy countries, and spending is increasing at an unsustainable rate. [...] The pricing of health care goods and services is substantially higher in the United States than in other developed nations. A 2003 analysis of OECD data showed that health care utilization in the United States did not exceed that of other countries, and price was the key driver of spending differences.

Much of this excessive cost is due to the enormous inefficiency and bureaucracy of the American system. There is a massive amount of administrative spending in the US, which is due primarily to the fragmented multi-payer nature of the healthcare system. According to the ACP:

In large part owing to its pluralistic financing system, the United States spends more on administration of health care than peer countries. One study estimated that in 2012, the United States spent \$471 billion on billing and insurance-related costs—\$375 billion (80%) more than in a “simplified financing system,” such as Canada’s single-payer model. Another study concluded that administrative costs were 31% of total U.S. health care expenditures, nearly double those of Canada.

These findings are validated by a [study](#) in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, which said the following:

The fragmented financing system is one of the principal explanations for the high cost of medical care in the United States. A careful consolidation of financing into some form of single-payer system is probably the only feasible solution.

Another [study](#) from the same journal says the following:

The United States spent approximately twice as much as other high-income countries on medical care, yet utilization rates in the United States were largely similar to those in other nations. Prices of labor and goods, including pharmaceuticals, and administrative costs appeared to be the major drivers of the difference in overall cost between the United States and other high-income countries.

Consider the subpar outcomes of the American healthcare system, these high expenditures are entirely unwarranted, and should be a source of national shame for the USA.

Access to Care and Lack of Insurance

To make matters worse, a large chunk of the American population is uninsured, and many are forced to go without the care that they need. According to the ACP:

The United States is the only wealthy industrialized nation without universal health coverage, a crucial component to ensuring quality health care for all without financial burden that causes delay or avoidance of necessary medical care... nearly 30 million remain uninsured, millions more are underinsured, and the number of uninsured persons is expected to grow.

The high rate of uninsured people is extremely troubling, especially seeing as a lack of insurance is associated with increased risk of mortality. A 2009 [study](#) in the *American Journal of Public Health* said the following on the matter:

Uninsurance is associated with mortality. [...] Lack of health insurance is associated with as many as 44 789 deaths per year in the United States, more than those caused by kidney disease.

A 2017 [study](#) in the *Annals of Internal Medicine* validated these findings, saying:

The evidence strengthens confidence in the Institute of Medicine's conclusion that health insurance saves lives: The odds of dying among the insured relative to the uninsured is 0.71 to 0.97.

The high costs of US medical care cause a great deal of financial strain for patients. According to a 2019 [study](#) in the *Journal of General Internal Medicine* (carried out by the American Cancer Society), "medical financial hardship is common among adults in the USA, with nearly 140 million adults reporting hardship in the past year. Among those aged 18–64 years, more than half report problems with medical bills or medical debt; stress or worry; or forgoing or delaying health care due to cost." A 2019 Gallup [poll](#) found that 25% of Americans say that they or a family member have put off treatment for a "serious illness" in the past year because of cost, with a further 8% saying they or a family member has put off treatment for a "less serious illness" in the past year.

Overall, there is strong evidence that the United States' lack of universal healthcare causes tens of thousands of deaths every year, and financial ruin for many more.

Single-Payer as the Solution to America's Healthcare Problem

Of all the potential solutions put forward by politicians and activists, only one has any chance of actually solving the problem: the establishment of a universal, single-payer system. According to a 2020 [study](#) in the *Lancet* (conducted at Yale Medical School), a single-payer system would save an enormous amount of money and (more importantly) lives:

Taking into account both the costs of coverage expansion and the savings that would be achieved through the Medicare for All Act, we calculate that a single-payer, universal health-care system is likely to lead to a 13% savings in national health-care expenditure, equivalent to more than US \$450 billion annually (based on the value of the US\$ in 2017). [...] Furthermore, we estimate that ensuring health-care access for all Americans would save more than 68 000 lives and 1.73 million life-years every year compared with the status quo.

Claims that a single-payer system would be unaffordable are entirely baseless, and contradicted by the overwhelming mass of evidence. A 2020 [meta-analysis](#) in *PLOS Medicine* found "a high degree of analytic consensus for the fiscal feasibility of a single-payer approach in the US." As they put it:

There is near-consensus in these analyses that single-payer would reduce health expenditures while providing high-quality insurance to all US residents. To achieve net savings, single-payer plans rely on simplified billing and negotiated drug price reductions, as well as global budgets to control spending growth over time. Replacing private insurers with a public system is expected to achieve lower net healthcare costs.

With these findings in mind, it is clear that a single-payer system is the only way to solve the problems of the American healthcare system. In healthcare (as in so many other things), capitalism and market-forces can do nothing but harm.

Conclusion

All-in-all, it is clear that the American medical system is broken to the point where mild reforms cannot hope to fix the problems. The system as a whole must be scrapped; market-forces and private insurance must be removed entirely, and an entirely public, universal system must be established, based on a single-payer financing system. Only then can we hope to provide healthcare to all people free at the point of use, as is their right as human beings.

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Some Facts About Poverty in the United States

Hello comrades. We are constantly told about how the American economy is "the best it's ever been"; however, this narrative does not hold up to even the slightest scrutiny. For example, we are constantly told about the low unemployment rate; what we *aren't* told about is how pitiful many of these new jobs really are. According to a [study](#) from the Brookings Institute: 53 million Americans between the ages of 18 to 64—**accounting for 44% of all workers**—qualify as "low-wage." Their median hourly wages are \$10.22, and median annual earnings are about \$18,000.

Almost *half* of the American workforce is officially "low-wage," and that's only if we use an *extremely* low standard (below minimum wage, in some states). This is especially horrifying when we remember how many deaths can be directly linked to poverty and deprivation in the United States. According to a [study](#) from Columbia University:

Overall, 4.5% of U.S. deaths were found to be attributable to poverty... the number of deaths the researchers calculated as attributable to low education (245,000) is comparable to the number caused by heart attacks (192,898), which was the leading cause of U.S. deaths in 2000. The number of deaths attributable to racial segregation (176,000) is comparable to the number from cerebrovascular disease (167,661), the third leading cause of death in 2000, and the number attributable to low social support (162,000) compares to deaths from lung cancer (155,521).

The United States also ranks at the very bottom of the developed world in terms of preventable deaths. According to an [article](#) in *Reuters*:

If the U.S. health care system performed as well as those of [comparable nations], there would be 101,000 fewer deaths in the United States per year, according to researchers writing in the journal Health Affairs.

Hundreds of thousands of people are dying every year because of poverty, deprivation, and lack of access to social services. Capitalism is a fundamentally broken system, which must be abolished.

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The Crimes of US Foreign Policy: A Very Brief Introduction

Introduction

The United States has long seen itself as a very special nation, playing a uniquely noble role on the world stage. While other nations are said to be guided by vulgar self-interest, the United States is supposedly different; the primary goal of American foreign policy is, according to the State Department's [website](#), to "promote and demonstrate democratic values and advance a free, peaceful, and prosperous world." But how well does the United States live up to those so-called "democratic values"? Does it in fact promote the cause of a "free, peaceful, and prosperous world"? Let's look at the facts.

US Foreign Aid and Human Rights

To begin with, the US has a horrific foreign aid record. It seems that American aid is quite a good predictor of human rights abuses, and that this trend goes back decades; according to a 1981 [study](#) in the journal *Comparative Politics*, US aid is "clearly distributed disproportionately to countries with repressive governments... this distribution represented a pattern and not merely one or a few isolated cases." Indeed, it is quite easy to find examples of the United States supporting vicious repressive regimes (such as Pinochet's Chile, the Shah of Iran, and the military junta of El Salvador).

Similarly, a 1984 [study](#) in the *Journal of Peace Research* looked at human rights and US aid under Nixon, Ford, and Carter. The authors found that “under Presidents Nixon and Ford foreign assistance was directly related to levels of human rights violations, i.e. more aid flowed to regimes with higher levels of violation, while under President Carter no clear statistical pattern emerged.” They therefore conclude that “the Carter administration did not implement a policy of human rights which actually guided the disposition of military and economic assistance.” In other words, the US attitude towards human rights seems to vary from outright hostility (under more conservative administrations) to mere indifference (under more liberal ones).

More recent studies have painted a similarly bleak picture. A 2008 [book](#) by Rhonda Callaway and Elizabeth Matthews found that “both United States economic and military aid have detrimental effects on security rights of the citizens in recipient states.” They note that these results “provide support for those critical of the US foreign assistance program.” The most recent research has continued to back up these conclusions. A 2016 [study](#) in the *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* sampled 150 countries from 1972 to 2008, finding that “US aid harms political rights, fosters other forms of state repression (measured along multiple dimensions), and strengthens authoritarian governance. [...] These findings counter the publicly stated objectives of the US government to foster political liberalization abroad via bilateral economic assistance.”

All-in-all, it seems that aid from the United States has a deleterious impact on the human rights situation in recipient nations. It provides military and economic aid to repressive regimes, arming and propping up some of the most vicious dictators on the planet, all in service of its own interests.

The Human Cost of the "War on Terror"

Lest we think that the harm of US foreign policy stops at providing aid to dictators, the United States has also carried out a great deal of violence all on its own. To demonstrate the enormous death toll of US military intervention and invasion, let's take a look at the post-9/11 "War on Terror," including the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan (among others).

According to a 2019 [report](#) from Brown University's Costs of War project, "between 770,000 and 801,000 people have died" in what the report refers to as "America's post-9/11 wars." This tally does not include so-called "indirect deaths," such as those resulting from displacement and the destruction of crucial infrastructure (e.g. water and sanitation systems). In a 2019 [article](#) for the *Hill*, David Vine (Professor of Anthropology at American University) writes that "total deaths during the post-2001 U.S. wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Pakistan and Yemen [are] likely to reach 3.1 million or more — around 200 times the number of U.S. dead." Others have come to similar conclusions. According to a 2018 [report](#) from the *Intercept*:

In addition to those killed by direct acts [of] violence, the number of indirect deaths — those resulting from disease, displacement, and the loss of critical infrastructure — is believed to be several times higher, running into the millions.

These death tolls are backed up by earlier research. A 2009 [article](#) from the MIT Center for International Studies, which looked *only* at Iraq, found that "we have, at present, between 800,000 and 1.3 million 'excess deaths' in this war as we approach its six-year anniversary." Keep in mind that this is only one of the invaded countries, and that this article was authored in 2009 (more than a decade ago). The current death tolls, when factoring in all nations (as well as the decade of subsequent warfare), are likely many times higher.

The United States government has engaged in a concerted effort to hide the civilian cost of its Middle Eastern wars. According to a 2017 [report](#) from the *New York Times*, the actual rate of civilian casualties inflicted by coalition forces in the Middle East is "more than 31 times that acknowledged by the coalition. It is at such a distance from official claims that, in terms of civilian deaths, this may be the least transparent war in recent American history."

In point of fact, US forces often kill more people than the terrorists they are supposedly there to fight; a 2019 [article](#) in the *New York Times* reports that "more civilians are being killed by Afghan government and American forces than by the Taliban and other insurgents, according to a [United Nations] report on Wednesday." This is not even mentioning the US drone program, which was detailed in a 2013 [report](#) from the *Intercept*. To make matters worse, civilian casualties from US wars have been increasing dramatically since Donald Trump took office, according to a 2018 [article](#) from the *Washington Post*.

While it must be noted that the United States did not personally kill all of the millions of people mentioned above, it still bears a heavy burden for these deaths, having initiated the invasions, and started the entire conflict. In the same way that we hold Hitler responsible for the deaths of WWII (since he was the one who started it), so too should we hold the United States responsible for the deaths listed above. For more information on the civilian cost of US intervention, I recommend *The Deaths of Others: The Fate of Civilians in America's Wars*, a [study](#) authored by John Tirman, director of the MIT Center for International Studies.

Coups and Regime Change: The Case of Chile

The United States has a long history of overthrowing governments it doesn't like, typically then replacing them with brutal dictatorships. There are many, *many* examples of this, ranging from Jacobo Arbenz in Guatemala, to Mohammad Mosaddegh in Iran (a coup for which the CIA actually [admitted responsibility](#) in 2013). In order to understand the horrific effects that these coups often have, it will be helpful to take a particular example: that of Chile, where in 1973 the United States helped to overthrow the elected socialist government of Salvador Allende,

replacing it with the right-wing dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet. A 2017 [article](#) in the *New York Times* details many of the documents proving US intervention. As one man put it:

"To see on a piece of paper, for example, the president of the United States ordering the C.I.A. to preemptively overthrow a democratically elected president in Chile is stunning," Mr. Kornbluh said. "The importance of having these documents in the museum is for the new generations of Chileans to actually see them."

As if this were not enough, in a 2014 [interview](#) with the *Atlantic*, Jack Devine (a former CIA agent who was in Chile at the time of the coup) confirmed that the Nixon administration was directly instructing the CIA to support the coup. According to [declassified documents](#), Nixon had previously ordered Henry Kissinger to "make the economy scream," in an effort to rally support for the right-wing forces. The United States also attempted to prevent Allende from being inaugurated after his election, and provided support for state-terrorist campaigns after the coup. Now that the US role has been established, let's look at what Pinochet did once in power.

To begin with, Pinochet killed, tortured, and "disappeared" tens of thousands of people. According to a 2011 [article](#) from the BBC, the "total of recognized victims" numbers over 40,000, including more than 3,000 who were killed or forcibly disappeared. The rest were kidnapped, tortured, exiled, or some combination of the above. Pinochet was one of the most vicious dictators in the history of Latin America, and the United States played a direct role in propping up his regime.

In addition, Pinochet introduced hard-line neoliberal reforms, which did immense damage to Chile's economy. A good [study](#) on this was published in 1990 in the journal *Critical Sociology*. The authors note that growth rates under Pinochet were remarkably unimpressive:

The Pinochet model produced growth rates well below the Chilean average established over the 1950-72 period. The average yearly GDP rate of growth in the latter period was 3.9 percent, while the Pinochet regime averaged 1.4 percent over the 1974-83 period... overall growth throughout the 1980s has been far from miraculous: GDP per capita grew at a 1.2 percent average rate between 1980 and 1989, below the 1.7 percent average yearly rate for 1950-72.

In addition, the authors charge Pinochet with "creating a great deal of poverty," noting that unemployment "rose dramatically after the coup," while real wages fell. At the same time, social expenditures were reduced, and "infectious diseases readily associated with poverty, overcrowding poor hygiene, and inadequate sanitation underwent explosive growth." This assessment is echoed by a [study](#) in the *International Development Planning Review*, which found that "the radical neoliberal policies and structural adjustment of the 1970s and 1980s during the Pinochet regime had severe negative effects on the poor and middle class." The poverty

rate itself increased dramatically; according to a [report](#) from the North American Congress on Latin America:

The number of poor Chileans doubled during the Pinochet regime. By 1989, 44% of Chileans lived in poverty.

In addition, it seems that Pinochet's privatizations also helped to create enormous corruption. According to a [study](#) in the *Journal of Economic History*, "firms were sold underpriced to politically connected buyers." This had predictable consequences:

These newly private firms benefited financially from the Pinochet regime. Once democracy arrived, they formed connections with the new government, financed political campaigns, and were more likely to appear in the Panama Papers. These findings reveal how dictatorships can influence young democracies using privatization reforms.

All of this goes to show the horrifying impact that US intervention in regime change had on Chile. One can only imagine the combined suffering of the people in all of the nations that the United States has "intervened" in over the last several decades.

Conclusion

This has been only a very brief summary of the crimes committed abroad by the United States government. Some of the very worst offenses (most notably the Vietnam War, as well as [US support for the Pol Pot regime](#)) have been omitted, if only because they are so egregious as to require their own post. Hopefully this has given a general introduction to the topic, which will spark the reader to make their own investigation into the issue. Useful reading includes *Killing Hope* by William Blum, as well as *Rogue State: A Guide to the World's Only Superpower*, by the same author.

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Debunking Myths About the Police (AKA Refuting Copaganda)

Myth #1: "Police Have a Dangerous Job!"

Law enforcement is not a particularly dangerous profession. According to [figures](#) from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, delivery and truck drivers are about twice as likely to die on the job compared to police. Fishers and logging workers are about *ten times* as likely to die at work as are police officers.

In addition, according to [figures](#) from the FBI, many cops killed on the job die from accidents (such as traffic fatalities), not from homicide. The murder rate for police (3 per 100,000) is significantly *lower* than that for the general population (5 per 100,000). The idea that cops face any great danger on the job (aside from incompetent driving, apparently) is an absolute myth.

Myth #2: "Most Cops Are Good / It's a Few Bad Apples!"

The vast majority of police officers have either committed, or covered up, at least one instance of police misconduct. According to a [study](#) from the US Department of Justice (based on survey data from police officers themselves), 61% of cops "do not always report even serious criminal violations that involve the abuse of authority by fellow officers." 52% of cops believed that "It is not unusual for officers to ignore improper conduct by their fellow officers." A strong majority of cops allow their fellow officers to get away with misconduct, and believe that others do it as well. This is indicative of a culture of abuse within police departments.

In addition, the use of force by police is very often improper; according to the DOJ, "improper force was used in 38 percent of encounters that involved force." More than *one-third* of all police uses of force are "improper," and those are just the ones that we know about!

Myth #3: "Police Aren't Racially Biased, Minorities Just Commit More Crime!"

There is significant evidence of systemic discrimination against minorities by police. For example, according to a [report](#) from the American Civil Liberties Union, blacks are nearly *four times* more likely than whites to be arrested for marijuana, despite similar rates of usage. In some states, such as Iowa and Illinois, the situation is even worse, with black residents being *eight times* as likely to be arrested for marijuana. Even for crimes which whites and blacks commit at about the same rate, blacks are *significantly* more likely to be arrested.

Blacks are far more likely to be unjustly shot by police than are whites. According to a [study](#) in the *American Journal of Preventative Medicine*, "Black victims were significantly more likely to be unarmed than white or Hispanic victims. Black victims were also significantly less likely than whites to have posed an immediate threat to [law enforcement]." Another [study](#), this one from the journal *Social Psychology and Personality Science*, found that "there is strong and statistically reliable evidence of anti-Black racial disparities in the killing of unarmed Americans by police," even *after* accounting for different violent crime rates.

In addition, it seems that racial bias in the use of force is often masked by administrative records. A [study](#) in the *American Political Science Review* found that "if police racially discriminate when choosing whom to investigate, analyses using administrative records to estimate racial discrimination in police behavior are statistically biased, and many quantities of interest are unidentified—even among investigated individuals—absent strong and untestable assumptions." In other words, racial discrimination could be even worse than available statistics indicate.

To summarize, racial minorities (especially black people) are more likely to be arrested for a crime which whites commit at the same rate, and they are also more likely to be shot while unarmed and/or not posing a threat to police.

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Essays on Socialism in Latin America

Masterpost on Cuban Socialism, With Sources

Introduction

The Republic of Cuba has had an extraordinary political influence for a nation its size. Its revolution served as an inspiration to victims of imperialism everywhere, and its socialist model has provided an example for the oppressed people of the world to follow.

Since Bernie Sanders' complementary statements on certain aspects of the Cuban Revolution, the socialist island has found itself pushed back somewhat into the popular discourse. As such, it is the duty of all socialists to be well-informed about this nation.

As always, all sources will be listed at the end.

Pre-Revolutionary Cuba

Before learning about the achievements of Cuban socialism, we should take a moment to examine what life was like before the revolution. Fulgencio Batista's defenders will typically claim that living standards were better before the revolution. However, a quick examination of the facts will show this to be nonsense. It is true that Batista's reign saw relatively high GDP growth; however, human development indicators paint a far bleaker picture. According to a [paper](#) from Cornell University:

Opinions aside, although Cuba ranked as one of the most prosperous developing countries in the 1950s based on gross domestic product (GDP), social indicators for this period portray dismal social conditions, particularly among the rural peasants.

Batista's regime left the Cuban people (especially the large rural population) mired in poverty and illness. According to the aforementioned paper, contemporary studies reported a 91% malnutrition rate among agricultural workers. Though some commentators consider this figure to be too high, "it nonetheless conveys the magnitude of rural impoverishment." Health conditions are summarized by a [study](#) in the *West Indian Medical Journal*:

Poor hygiene, inefficient sanitation and malnutrition [contributed] to the infant mortality rate of 60 per 1000 lives, maternal mortality rate of 125.3 per 1000, [and] a general mortality rate of 6.4 per 1000.

The rural population in particular suffered from dismal health conditions; according to a [study](#) published in the *American Journal of Public Health*:

Cuba had only 1 rural hospital, only 11% of farm worker families drank milk, and rural infant mortality stood at 100 per 1000 live births.

Infrastructure was also pitifully underdeveloped under Batista. According to the aforementioned Cornell paper:

According to the 1953 census, 54.1 percent of rural homes had no toilets of any kind. Only 2.3 percent of rural homes had indoor plumbing, compared with 54.6 of urban homes. In rural areas, 9.1 percent of houses had electricity, compared with 87 percent of houses in urban areas.

Illiteracy and unemployment were widespread under Batista:

Nearly one-quarter of people 10 years of age and older could not read or write, and the unemployment rate was 25 percent.

The high illiteracy rate is hardly surprising when one remembers the shoddy state of education in pre-revolutionary Cuba. According to an [article](#) in the *Guardian*:

In 1958, under the Batista dictatorship, half of Cuba's children did not attend school.

All of this is not even mentioning the imperialist domination, organized crime, and rampant exploitation that the Cuban people endured throughout Batista's reign. With all of this in mind, let us move on to examining the Cuban revolution and its achievements.

Economic and Nutritional Indicators After the Revolution

Since the very beginning, the Cuban revolution has been committed to the improvement of life for the people in both the economic and social spheres. According to a [report](#) from Oxfam America:

When Cuba's revolution came to power in 1959, its model of development aimed to link economic growth with advances in social justice. From the start, transforming economic changes were accompanied by equally transforming social initiatives. For example, in 1959, Cuba carried out a profound agrarian reform which ended latifundia [the land estate system] in the island and distributed land to thousands of formerly landless small farmers.

Despite economic pressure, Cuba has largely succeeded in providing a decent quality of life for its people. According to United Nations data, the unemployment rate in Cuba [remains below 3%](#), as it has for decades. Unofficial rates may be slightly higher, but even *twice* this rate would still place Cuba far below the regional average (and *far* lower than under Batista).

According to the [2019 Global Hunger Index](#), Cuba is one of only seventeen nations on Earth (and only four in Latin America) to have a score lower than 5, signifying impressively low levels of hunger. Cuba's rate of undernourishment is below 2.5%.

According to a [report](#) from Our World in Data (based at the University of Oxford), Americans are more than twice as likely as Cubans to die from malnutrition.

According to a [report](#) from the FAO, "remarkably low percentages of child malnutrition put Cuba at the forefront of developing countries."

According to a [report](#) from the United States Department of Agriculture, the average Cuban consumes approx. 3300 calories per day, far above the Latin American and Caribbean average, and only slightly lower than in the United States. Approx. 2/3 of nutritional needs are met by monthly food rations, while the rest is bought independently. The report also states:

The Cuban economy has made remarkable progress toward recovery from the economic disaster generated by the collapse of the Soviet Bloc.

In its [report on Cuba](#), the World Food Program (the food-assistance branch of the United Nations) states that that:

Over the last 50 years, comprehensive social protection programs have largely eradicated poverty and hunger. Food-based social safety nets include a monthly food basket for the entire population, school feeding programs, and mother-and-child health care programs.

This is especially impressive when Cuba is compared to other developing countries, and considering the decades of economic blockade that the nation has endured. The report also states:

The largest island in the Caribbean, Cuba ranks 72th out of 189 countries in the 2019 Human Development Index and is one of the most successful in achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

An [article](#) in the *Guardian* addresses this topic:

...the evidence suggests that Cuba has made excellent progress towards the MDGs in the last decade, building on what are already universally acknowledged to be outstanding achievements in equitable health and education standards.

According to a new MDG Report Card by the Overseas Development Institute, Cuba is among the 20 best performing countries in the world.

The article also includes a statement from a Cuban economist on how this progress is made: The Cuban economy is planned and we redistribute income from the most dynamic sectors, which generate most foreign exchange, towards those that are less dynamic but necessary for the country. That's how we maintain a budget to keep health and education high quality and free of charge to the user.

The revolution greatly improved the housing situation in Cuba, and also brought significant urban development. According to Oxfam America:

Initiatives in the cities were no less ambitious. Urban reform brought a halving of rents for Cuban tenants, opportunities for tenants to own their housing, and an ambitious program of housing construction for those living in marginal shantytowns. New housing, along with the implementation of measures to create jobs and reduce unemployment, especially among women, rapidly transformed the former shantytowns.

Finally, the social security and pensions system in Cuba has drastically improved since the revolution, as evidenced by this statement from the aforementioned Oxfam America report:

Both coverage and distribution have improved significantly since the revolution. With a pension system since the 1930's, Cuba was one of the first Latin American countries to establish one. It consisted of independent pension funds and by 1959 covered about 63% of workers, but the system varied greatly in terms of benefits and relied almost exclusively on workers' contributions. Since

1959, the program has been funded completely by the government. In 1958, about 63% of the labor force was covered for old age, disability, and survivors insurance; today, the coverage is universal.

All in all, living standards have improved greatly since the revolution.

Sustainable Development and Environmental Preservation

According to a [study](#) in the journal *Ecological Economics*, Cuba is [the most sustainably developed country in the world](#). This is based on the [Sustainable Development Index](#), which measures a nation's human development outcomes (health and education, per-capita income, etc.) and factors in the country's environmental impact. This result was confirmed in a separate [report from the World Wildlife Fund](#).

Cuba is also [one of the only nations to meet conditions for sustainable development](#), and has been [praised by the WWF](#) for its "enlightened environmental policies." Considering the increasingly urgent threat posed by climate change and environmental catastrophe, Cuba provides a model for the rest of the world to aspire to.

Healthcare Indicators

Cuba's healthcare system is one of its most impressive and well-known achievements. According to the aforementioned [paper](#) from Cornell University:

Cuba's superior health indicators—highly ranked both regionally and globally—are attributed to the country's universal primary healthcare services.

The Cuban health system is based on public investment and universal provision. According to a [report](#) from the National Association of Social Workers:

Cuba has the largest number of doctors per capita of any country in the world... the country devotes almost a quarter of its gross domestic product (GDP) to education and health care—nearly twice the percentage of U.S. GDP allotted to the same expenses. As a result, the country guarantees free education and health care for all citizens, and women receive six weeks of paid prenatal maternity leave and up to one year of paid leave after giving birth.

According to [data](#) from the World Bank, Cuba's life expectancy is slightly *longer* than that of the United States. Compare this to the pre-revolutionary era, when the Cuban life expectancy was approximately six years shorter than the American life expectancy.

Also, according to [data](#) from the World Bank, Cuba's infant mortality rate is approximately one-third *lower* than that of the United States. Compare this to the pre-revolutionary era, when the Cuban infant mortality rate was nearly *double* that of the USA.

According to a 2019 [study](#) published in the *Journal of Developing Societies*, Cuba's health indicators surpass those of developed nations, despite far lower expenditures:

While Cuba spends about one-twentieth per capita on healthcare compared to the USA... people in Cuba nevertheless enjoy longer life expectancy (79 years) than do people in the USA (78 years)... Cuba also has a superior childhood mortality rate (the number of deaths to age 5 per 1,000 live births per year) of six, compared to eight in the USA.

Cuba has also made some amazing healthcare developments. According to the WHO, [Cuba is the first nation in the world to eliminate mother-to-child HIV and syphilis transmission](#).

According to the *Washington Post*, [Cuba has developed a potential vaccine against lung cancer](#), which has shown very promising results, and is being tested in the USA.

The Cuban experience provides an important model for other nations to follow. According to a [study](#) in the *International Journal of Epidemiology* (published by the Oxford University Press):

Cuba represents an important alternative example where modest infrastructure investments combined with a well-developed public health strategy have generated health status measures comparable with those of industrialized countries... If the Cuban experience were generalized to other poor and middle-income countries human health would be transformed.

An [article](#) in the *Guardian* summarizes this topic quite well:

Whether it is a consultation, dentures or open heart surgery, citizens are entitled to free treatment. As a result the impoverished island boasts better health indicators than its exponentially richer neighbour 90 miles across the Florida straits.

As one aforementioned [study](#) put it:

Cuba is an anomaly, a poor nation that has very good public healthcare... Cuba's public healthcare system, all in all, provides a strong example of progress, an inspiration for other less developed nations to emulate.

This is an enormously impressive achievement.

Educational Developments

Since the revolution, enormous strides have been made in education. One of the most significant developments was the National Literacy Campaign, spearheaded by Che Guevara. According to [Oxfam America](#):

The National Literacy Campaign of 1961, recognized as one of the most successful initiatives of its kind, mobilized teachers, workers, and secondary school students to teach more than 700,000 persons how to read. This campaign reduced the illiteracy rate from 23% to 4% in the space of one year.

Before the revolution, literacy in Cuba was between 60% and 76%, depending on the estimates used. Today, the [CIA World Factbook](#) gives Cuba's literacy rate as 99.8%.

In addition, [Cuba spends a higher percentage of GDP on education than any other nation in the world](#). This has resulted in impressive results; according to a 2014 [study](#) from the World Bank, [Cuba has the only "high quality" educational system in Latin America](#).

Infrastructural Developments

In 1959, approx. 50% of Cuban households had access to electricity. According to [a report from the Environmental Defense Fund](#), by 1989, more than 95% of households had access to electricity, including in rural areas, which had previously been almost entirely deprived. Cuba also surpassed many of its neighbors in terms of electricity generation:

By 1990 Cuba had roughly 1.8 times more generating capacity per person than the Dominican Republic and 1.3 times more than Jamaica.

In Cuba, [access to clean water and sanitation has greatly improved since the revolution](#). According to United Nations data, as of 2018, 96.4% of the urban population and 89.8% of the rural population had access to clean drinking water, while 94.4% of the urban population and 89.1% of the rural population had access to improved sanitation services.

An excellent [article](#) in the *Independent* discussed this issue quite well:

This is Fidel's legacy. Clean water and electricity for all. And universal free education and healthcare. Cubans often joke that they're healthier and better educated than Americans despite the 50-year-plus US blockade.

So for me, rural Cuba is Fidel's Cuba. His ideals live on here – and the rural poor of Cuba have benefited the most from his cradle-to-grave policies. Here, the grandchildren of peasants really do go on to become consultant surgeons and commercial airline pilots.

This is an enormous credit to the revolution.

Social Policy

The Cuban revolution has also made great strides in eliminating discrimination and inequality. As the [report](#) from Oxfam America states:

Social policy has also favored the development of equity across society, including the equitable distribution of benefits across all sectors of the population, sometimes favoring the most vulnerable. In the last 40 years Cubans have greatly reduced differences in income between the lowest and the highest paid persons. Women have benefited significantly from the revolution as they have educated themselves and entered the labor force in large numbers. The differences among Cubans of different races have also been reduced.

Considering the widespread racial and gender discrimination that existed before the revolution, these achievements must be admired.

Popular Opinion in Cuba

According to an [article](#) published in the *New Republic*, Cubans are significantly more satisfied with their political system than Americans are with theirs. The same holds true for the healthcare and education systems:

More than two-thirds of Cubans—68 percent—are satisfied with their health care system. About 66 percent of Americans said the same in a November 2014 Gallup poll. Seventy-two percent of Cubans are satisfied with their education system, while an August 2014 Gallup poll found that less than half of Americans—48 percent—are “completely” or “somewhat” satisfied with the quality of K-12 education.

The Cuban people also recently ratified a new constitution, which reasserts the role of the Communist Party, and affirms that Cuba is a socialist state advancing towards communism. The constitution also includes some political and economic reforms, such as the recognition of small businesses, and the presumption of innocence in the court system. According to an [article](#) from Reuters, independent evidence supports the official vote tally (approx. 90% support):

The independent online newspaper El Toque asked readers to send in local tallies, a dozen of which showed overwhelming support for ratification.

Yoani Sanchez, "Cuba's best-known dissident," witnessed the count at her local polling station, reporting the results as "400 yes votes, 25 no votes and 4 blank ballots." This suggests that the

official results were correct, and the Cuban people did overwhelmingly support the new constitution.

An [article](#) in the *Independent*, written by an author whose family lives in Cuba, sums this issue up well:

Most Cubans I speak to support the reshaping of the economy and the greater ties with the US. Just like us, they want to better their lives, they want a better mobile phone, a bigger house, they want to travel. But none of them would want to live in a Cuba, no matter how rich, without universal free education, free healthcare, cheap public transport and the lowest rates of violent crime in the Americas. None of them. This is Fidel's legacy.

While the Cuban people largely support economic reform and normalization of relations with the USA, their overall support for the achievements of their socialist system remains high. As the *New Republic* puts it:

Objective indicators, like the country's low infant mortality and illiteracy rates, have long shown that Cuba has relatively strong social services. This new polling data suggests that Cubans are well aware of it.

This is an important credit to the revolution.

"But What About the Cuban Exiles?"

The most common argument against Cuban socialism is that the Cuban exile population (and their strong distaste for socialism) somehow "proves" that socialist Cuba is terrible. However, this omits a key fact: the exiles come primarily from the wealthy class of Cuba. According to a [study](#) in the journal *Social Problems* (published by the Oxford University Press):

Comparison of the occupational, age, and educational composition of the community with the Cuban population indicates that the refugees are better educated and come from higher status occupations than the population from which they have exiled themselves... more recent exiles are more representative of the Cuban population, but the rural worker is still vastly underrepresented.

Another thing to consider is that the exile took place during a time of conflict and difficulty for Cuba; the revolution was still very new, and the government had not entirely established itself yet. This likely explains why there were some outliers (i.e. exiles from the working-class population), although the majority were still from the wealthy sectors of Cuban society.

Conclusion

Cuba is a nation with many problems; the economy has slowed since the fall of the Soviet Union (losing your only major trading partner tends to hurt a nation's economy), and international pressure from the USA continues to place Cuba under strain. However, the enormous achievements of the revolution cannot be overlooked; Cuba has provided first-world health and educational standards on a third-world budget, as well as above-average nutrition and infrastructure, all while standing up to the world's most powerful imperialist force, only ninety miles off its shores.

One struggles to find a proper statement with which to sum up the achievements of the Cuban revolution. Perhaps this one, from former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan (from April 11, 2000):

Cuba's achievements in social development are impressive given the size of its gross domestic product per capita. As the human development index of the United Nations makes clear year after year, Cuba should be the envy of many other nations, ostensibly far richer. [Cuba] demonstrates how much nations can do with the resources they have if they focus on the right priorities – health, education, and literacy.

Perhaps the best statement is given by Aviva Chomsky in her book [A History of the Cuban Revolution](#):

The Revolution has been wildly audacious, experimental, and diverse. It has evolved under often adverse circumstances. It created unprecedented socioeconomic equality, and showed the world that it is indeed possible for a poor, Third World country to feed, educate, and provide health care for its population... If we want to imagine a better world for all of us, I can think of no better place to start than by studying the Cuban Revolution.

That's something which we can all appreciate.

Sources

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- [Oxfam America | Cuba: Social Policy at the Crossroads](#)
- [UNdata | Country Profiles: Cuba](#)
- [2019 Global Hunger Index | Cuba](#)
- [Our World in Data | Deaths by Malnutrition in the USA and Cuba](#)
- [Food and Agricultural Organization \(United Nations\) | Report on Nutrition in Cuba](#)

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- [The Independent | My Family Live in Cuba - The People May Be Poor, But Fidel Castro's Legacy Will Live On](#)
- [Oxford University Press | Cubans in Exile: A Demographic Analysis](#)
- ["A History of the Cuban Revolution" by Aviva Chomsky](#)

On the Legacy of Che Guevara: Debunking Reactionary Myths, With Sources

Introduction

Hello comrades. To honor the 52nd anniversary of the death of Ernesto "Che" Guevara, I figured it would be appropriate to provide some sources debunking the common right-wing slanders thrown at him. Let's go over some of these myths in order. As always, sources will be listed at the bottom.

Was Che Guevara a Racist?

It is true that Guevara made racist statements when he was a young man, which experts unfortunately state "would not have been unusual coming from a 24-year-old from Argentina at the time" (see citation below) ; however, as he grew up, Guevara came to reject these statements and ideas. Quoting from a *Politifact* article on the topic:

At workers' rallies around that time, Guevara and Raul Castro talked about the need to "advance the revolution's anti-discrimination program," wrote Alejandro de la Fuente, a University of Pittsburgh history professor in his book A Nation for All: Race, Inequality and Politics in 20th Century Cuba. In the speech at Santa Clara, Guevara called for the university to "paint itself with black, paint itself with mulatto" students and teachers, Fuente wrote.

In 1964, Guevara spoke before the United Nations and criticized "racist" intervention by the west in the Congo, Anderson wrote in his book.

People who have studied Guevara said he was racially inclusive in his actions.

These sentiments are supported by various other experts on the topic, such as Jonathan Benjamin-Alvarado:

Jonathan Benjamin-Alvarado, a political science professor at the University of Nebraska who teaches Latino politics, said that Guevara underwent a transformation from his early days in Argentina.

"While there is evidence to support the claim that Ché made such statements, or harbored them in his mind as a young man, his role in the revolution was one where he openly espoused anti-racist, egalitarian ideals," Benjamin-Alvarado told PolitiFact in an email.

Perhaps Guevara's most explicit statement against racism came on December 11th, 1964, at a speech he gave at the United Nations:

Those who kill their own children and discriminate daily against them because of the color of their skin; those who let the murderers of blacks remain free, protecting them, and furthermore punishing the black population because they demand their legitimate rights as free men — how can those who do this consider themselves guardians of freedom? We understand that today the Assembly is not in a position to ask for explanations of these acts. It must be clearly established, however, that the government of the United States is not the champion of freedom, but rather the perpetrator of exploitation and oppression against the peoples of the world and against a large part of its own population.

And of course, Guevara fought alongside with black revolutionaries in the Congo, which he would not have done if he harbored racial hatred against them.

In short, it is clear and obvious to any honest person that Che Guevara was not a racist, and that he condemned racial discrimination, standing side-by-side with revolutionaries of all racial backgrounds.

Was Che Guevara a Murderer?

Perhaps the most well-known allegation against Guevara is that he killed innocent people, particularly during his time at the La Cabana fortress after the revolution. However, Jon Lee Anderson of the *New Yorker* (hardly a radical publication), and the author of the most definitive biography ever written of Guevara, *Che: A Revolutionary Life*, stated in an interview with PBS NewsHour:

While Che did indeed execute people [an episode I have gone into at length in my book] I have yet to find a single credible source pointing to a case where Che executed 'an innocent'. Those persons executed by Guevara or on his orders were condemned for the usual crimes punishable by death at times of war or in its aftermath: desertion, treason or crimes such as rape, torture or murder.

This lays the issue to rest; Guevara did *not* execute innocent people, or if he did, no evidence of it has ever been found.

Other Achievements of Che Guevara

It is worth noting that Che is not only a revolutionary symbol; he oversaw some very important developments within Cuba after the revolution. For one thing, Guevara was responsible for the Cuban literacy campaign, which according to Oxfam America, was extraordinarily successful:

The National Literacy Campaign of 1961, recognized as one of the most successful initiatives of its kind, mobilized teachers, workers, and secondary school students to teach more than 700,000 persons how to read. This campaign reduced the illiteracy rate from 23% to 4% in the space of one year.

He was also appointed head of the National Institute for Agrarian Reform, which oversaw the successful breakup of the large land estates which had prevailed before the revolution. According to Oxfam America:

When Cuba's revolution came to power in 1959, its model of development aimed to link economic growth with advances in social justice. From the start, transforming economic changes were accompanied by equally transforming social initiatives. For example, in 1959, Cuba carried out a profound agrarian reform which ended latifundia [land estate system] in the island and distributed land to thousands of formerly landless small farmers.

That being said, Guevara was not perfect; there are legitimate criticisms of him that one can make.

Legitimate Criticisms of Che Guevara

Che was a great man, yet he was not flawless. For one thing, it is undeniable that he was complicit in the homophobic policies of the revolutionary government; whether he played a direct role in them is unknown, but he certainly made no visible opposition.

In addition, Che was not a terribly good bureaucrat; his appointment as Minister of Industry was an undeniable mistake on Castro's part, and Che even seemed to dabble in some idealism when he suggested that workers be content with "moral certificates" rather than pay raises as incentives for harder work. In the book *Ernesto "Che" Guevara* by Douglas Kellner, Che is quoted as saying:

This is not a matter of how many pounds of meat one might be able to eat, or how many times a year someone can go to the beach, or how many ornaments from abroad one might be able to buy with his current salary. What really matters is that the individual feels more complete, with much more internal richness and much more responsibility.

These are legitimate issues on which Guevara can and should be critiqued. As Marxists, it is essential that we do not fall into the fatal trap of hero-worship; even the greatest revolutionaries remain fallible humans.

Conclusion

Guevara was one of the great revolutionaries of the 20th century; that much is beyond all doubt. His actions during and after the Cuban Revolution helped to bring about a better life for millions, while his image and influence have benefited countless more. The attempts to slander him as a racist and a murderer are disgraceful and dishonest.

Despite this, he was not flawless; he did nothing to fight homophobia in Cuba, and his performance as Minister of Industry is hard to describe as anything but incompetent. That being said, he remains one of the greatest of all proletarian revolutionaries, and an inspiration to all who would seek a better world.

Hasta la victoria siempre.

Sources

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Celebrating the Sandinistas: Sources on their Achievements

"What we see is a government faced with tremendous problems, some seemingly insuperable, bent on a great experiment which, though precarious and incomplete at many points, provides hope to the poor sectors of society, improves the conditions of education, literacy and health, and for the first time offers the Nicaraguan people a modicum of justice for all rather than a society offering privilege exclusively to the wealthy... and to the powerful." - World Council of Churches, Report on Nicaragua, 1983.

Introduction

Hello comrades. To celebrate the recent anniversary of the Sandinista revolution, let's go over some of their remarkable achievements. As always, sources will be listed at the end.

Economic and Nutritional Indicators

The Somoza dictatorship had left Nicaraguans mired in appalling poverty and destitution. According to the [book](#) *Nicaragua: The Threat of a Good Example*, published by Oxfam America: Studies showed that in some areas up to 83% of Nicaraguan children were malnourished, and the proportion of severely malnourished children could be as high as 45%.

This began to change when the Sandinistas took power in 1979. To begin with, "agricultural production increased by 8% between 1979 and 1983." In addition, "per capita consumption of the majority of basic foods increased." Oxfam America credited this directly to the Sandinistas' policies:

This has been made possible by Government subsidies and strict controls on prices and distribution of basic food items. Special distribution outlets were set up for eight basic commodities: rice, beans, maize, flour, sugar, salt, cooking oil and soap. More recently, distribution of these basic items through the neighbourhood groups has been tightened up to protect the interests of the poorest at a time of growing shortages and rising prices.

The Sandinistas also carried out significant land reform. According to a [study](#) from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, the land reform program made great progress in improving life for agricultural workers:

The Nicaraguan agrarian reform accomplished more during its first year of operation than most agrarian reforms achieve over much longer periods. [...] Rural workers were organized into a strong, national union, and began to receive better wages and to participate in government policy formulation and implementation. [...] These accomplishments were all the more impressive given the widespread destruction and crop failures facing Nicaragua at the end of the war.

The aforementioned report from Oxfam America discusses the issue as well, noting that the land reform provided land to tens of thousands of families:

The main beneficiaries from land reform and a five-fold increase in State credit between 1979 and 1982 were peasant farmers. Between October 1981 and August 1984, 49,661 families received titles to land.

Since regaining power in 2005, the Sandinistas have successfully brought about significant improvements to Nicaragua's economy and quality of life. According to [data](#) from the FAO, the Sandinistas' policies have led to a drastic reduction in malnutrition. On top of that, data from the World Bank shows that [the Sandinistas have cut poverty in half in Nicaragua](#). These accomplishments must be appreciated.

Healthcare Achievements

When the Sandinistas came to power, they inherited a terribly unhealthy nation, which had been ravaged by right-wing dictatorship. According to a [paper](#) in the journal *Critical Sociology*: When the Sandinistas came to power in 1979 they confronted a number of serious health problems bequeathed by the former Somoza regime.

Despite this, the Sandinistas managed to make many "impressive gains in healthcare," as is demonstrated by an examination of the statistical evidence. According to a [study](#) in the *American Journal of Public Health*:

Before the Nicaraguan revolution of 1979, access to health services was largely limited to the affluent sectors of the urban population and the minority of workers with social security coverage. Repeated attempts at reform by organized medicine were ineffective. Since the revolution, a tremendous expansion in health services has occurred.

Access to healthcare expanded massively, and a focus on preventative care was developed. According to the aforementioned report from Oxfam:

Whereas it is estimated that in 1979 little more than a quarter of the population could obtain medical services, by 1982 about 70% of Nicaraguans had regular access to healthcare. In the process, there was a radial shift from primarily curative, urban-based care for a privileged minority to an emphasis on on prevention, which is particularly striking in the area of maternal and child care.

These policies led to sharp improvements in the population's health conditions. According to the aforementioned [study](#):

Developments in health services, prevention activities, and education may be related to rapid improvements in the population's health status since 1979. It is estimated that, between 1978 and 1983, infant mortality decreased from 121 to 80.2 per 1,000 live births, life expectancy at birth rose from 52 to 59 years. The number of reported malaria cases has decreased by 50 per cent, polio cases have not been reported for two years, no measles cases were reported in the first half of 1984, and most other immunization preventable diseases are considerably reduced.

The social security system was also largely expanded:

The social security system is expanding rapidly. Since 1979, the percentage of the working population covered by social security has doubled, from 16 per cent to 32 per cent. Perhaps more importantly, most of the newly covered groups work in the formerly neglected agricultural sectors in outlying parts of the country. INSS coverage provides retirement insurance and workers' compensation among other non-medical benefits.

These are major achievements, representing a substantial improvement in the quality of life for hundreds of thousands (if not millions) of people.

Education and Literacy

According to a [report](#) from UNESCO, the Sandinista literacy campaign was an immense success:

The outcomes of the campaign were something to be proud of... Nicaragua made a substantial contribution to the world's experience in finding solutions to eradicate illiteracy.

The literacy rate improved dramatically, from approx. 50% to less than 13%:

In five months 95,582 brigadistas achieved in teaching 406,056 Nicaraguans to read and to write in Spanish so that the illiteracy rate of 50.35% could be reduced by 37.39 percentage points to 12.96%. In the more industrialized Pacific region the illiteracy rate was reduced from 28.06 to 7.8%, in the

central mountain region from 66.74% to 20.21%, and in the least developed Atlantic region the leap was biggest with 78.07% to 25.59%.

The campaign was a great benefit to the marginalized people of Nicaragua:

It brought tangible evidence to the most marginalized groups of Nicaraguans that the society was going to include them and the revolutionary movement change their lives for the better. The campaign was designed as part of a social transformation process aiming at the redistribution of power and wealth. The campaign helped people to develop basic skills, knowledge and attitudes conducive to this transformation.

This is among the most substantial expansions of literacy that Latin America has ever seen, and it ought to be recognized as a model of revolutionary education.

Social Policy and Gender Equality

According to the World Economic Forum, gender equality in Nicaragua has greatly improved under the Sandinistas. This is noted in a [study](#) from the University of Munich:

For the last five years, the World Economic Forum's annual Global Gender Gap Index has been reporting that Nicaragua is one of the most gender equal countries in the world. This is the culmination of a remarkable increase in gender equality in Nicaragua during the past decade, charted by the same index.

Women also benefited greatly from various Sandinista programs, such as the aforementioned literacy campaign. According to the UNESCO [report](#):

For many women the literacy campaign signified an opportunity for emancipation: 60% of the brigadistas were female, as were some 50% of the literacy learners. The separation of the teaching force (Popular Literacy Army) according to men and women increased the leadership opportunities for female brigadistas.

These are impressive strides, which make clear the dedication that the Sandinista revolutionaries had to improving the status of women, as well as their involvement in political activity and struggle.

Conclusion

While the Sandinistas have undeniably committed major mistakes in recent years (such as their growing affinity for neoliberal policies, austerity, etc.), their achievements cannot be

denied. This is especially true when we consider the terrible conditions they endured during the war, and the hostility of the US government since then.

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Masterpost on the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN)

"Everything for everyone, nothing for ourselves." - Zapatista Slogan

Introduction

Along with the Naxalite movement of India, the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (more commonly known as the EZLN, or simply the Zapatistas) is arguably the most significant revolutionary socialist formation in the world today. Since launching their insurrection on January 1st, 1994, the EZLN have served as an inspiration to leftists and indigenous people all over the world. In honor of the recent announcement that the EZLN are formally expanding their territory (source below), we should take this opportunity to discuss the Zapatistas, their achievements, and the lessons that they can teach us all. We can also study the pros and cons of their particular approach to revolutionary socialism, which focuses much more on community autonomy and direct democracy, rather than establishing a dictatorship of the proletariat.

As always, sources will be listed at the end, and I will mention which I am using when I quote.

Economic System and Living Standards

Before the formation of the EZLN, the people of Chiapas were ruthlessly exploited by the capitalist system that existed in their region. In 2015, Subcomandante Insurgente Moisés remarked:

Before the Zapatista Army for National Liberation was created, we indigenous from Chiapas didn't exist for the capitalist system; we weren't people to it; we weren't human. We didn't even exist as trash for it. And we imagine that's how it was for the other indigenous brothers and sisters in the rest of our country. And that's how we imagine it is in any country where indigenous people exist... No one knew about highways, no one knew that there were things called clinics and hospitals, much less schools, or classrooms for education. There were never any health campaigns, programs, grants, nothing. We were forgotten.

Since establishing their autonomous communities, the EZLN have radically transformed the economic system in the region. They have established a system based on cooperatives and collectively owned landholdings. Anarchist writer Hilary Klein writes:

In addition to health care and education, the Zapatistas have also constructed an economic infrastructure designed to address the high level of poverty in their communities. Often called a 'solidarity economy', the Zapatistas' autonomous economy offers a grassroots alternative to global capitalism [...] Economic cooperatives generate resources that are invested back into the community. Because of the gendered division of labor, there are often men's and women's cooperatives. Men, for example, have coffee or cattle cooperatives, whereas women have artisan cooperatives, chicken-raising cooperatives, and collective vegetable gardens. Cooperative stores provide merchandise for community members at reasonable prices while also generating income. Money raised by the cooperatives is used to cover shared expenses, for example when the community's representatives travel to a regional meeting.

This system has had some success in increasing incomes for the region; however, the EZLN's refusal to take state power has limited the extent of what they can achieve. Despite the rich natural resources of the region, the EZLN have chosen to remain primarily agrarian, refraining from attempts to extract and utilize these resources (for which they have received criticism from many Marxists, such as Louis Proyect). This is tied both to the refusal to take state power, and the desire to preserve traditional indigenous lifestyles (a major aspect of the Zapatista rebellion).

In short, while the EZLN have succeeded in breaking free from the chains of international capital and establishing a system based on mutual aid and common ownership, they have not established a fully-developed socialist economy. Whether they will do so in the future is yet to be seen. The real achievements of the EZLN are in the areas of health, education, and social policy, as we shall shortly see.

Healthcare in Zapatista Territories

Before the initial uprising, the people in present-day EZLN territory had very little access to healthcare, and they lived with truly wretched health conditions. According to the National University of Ireland, Cork:

This neglect of the provision of adequate healthcare services in Chiapas became one of the major issues that provoked the Zapatista movement into vocalizing its concerns... This vision quickly drew the Zapatista community together to begin the construction of a healthcare system centered on their individual needs, customs and culture. Autonomous healthcare was born and the concept rapidly became popular amongst all Zapatista communities.

Since the EZLN uprising of 1994, the Zapatistas have made great strides in healthcare in the territories under their control:

It is clear that the efforts invested by the Zapatistas in establishing a fully independent healthcare system using limited resources have been rewarded by the significant health benefits achieved throughout hundreds of Zapatista communities. The Zapatistas have witnessed improvements in women's and children's health. They have also seen the health benefits of improved hygiene as a result of the role of the health promoter and their role in educating the community. Autonomous healthcare has ignited a sense of purpose in the hearts and minds of community inhabitants as they confidently tackle the health problems of their villages. In essence, autonomous healthcare has undoubtedly brought lasting health benefits into the world of the Zapatistas.

The World Health Organization states:

There are currently some 200 community health houses and 25 autonomous regional clinics, some of which have already been in operation for 10 years, and a dental clinic... If we bear in mind that almost all the medical facilities have been built in places where none existed before, it is easy to appreciate the significance of achieving this objective thanks to an effort by the community.

The health of women has improved dramatically in Zapatista territories:

Autonomous healthcare is having a positive effect on women's and children's health. In regions where there were previously significantly high rates of death during childbirth, there has now been a period of eight years or more where no maternal deaths have been recorded. With the greater availability of local midwives and the basic medical knowledge provided by the health promoter, Zapatista women are now safely giving birth in their own communities, with a dramatically reduced risk of death. In addition to this, cancer screenings and sexual health examinations take place more frequently, further improving the quality of women's lives

The health of children has also been greatly improved. The National University of Ireland, Cork states:

As with women, the improvement in children's health is also noteworthy. Zapatistas now actively prioritize children's vaccinations ensuring that as many children as possible receive the necessary immunization. Health promoters are also trained to detect the symptoms associated with sepsis and jaundice in newborn infants and through the use of visual media, foreign organisations are teaching health promoters to identify and treat such illnesses.

Zapatista communities have higher rates of vaccination than pro-government communities in Chiapas:

With the wider availability of autonomous healthcare, 84% of Zapatista communities receive important vaccinations against diseases such as malaria. In pro-government communities that figure stands at only 75%, meaning that fewer of these community inhabitants have access to necessary vaccines despite the promises of State healthcare.

In addition, the Zapatistas have significantly reduced the levels of infectious disease in their communities:

A greater disparity is apparent between pro-government communities and Zapatista villages with regard to the treatment of tuberculosis. Currently, 32% of Zapatista inhabitants suffer TB while in larger portions of pro-government communities, a remarkable 84% continue to experience this respiratory infection.

The Zapatistas have also greatly improved hygiene and sanitation infrastructure in the territory under their control:

Currently, 74% of Zapatista communities now have access to toilet facilities and this has led to a vast improvement in personal hygiene. Only 54% of pro-government communities can claim access to toilet facilities in their homes. This provides clear evidence of the positive impact the health promoter has in educating communities around health and hygiene. It also suggests that the Zapatista communities have an appetite for knowledge and are willing to learn all that is necessary to protect their health.

The Zapatistas have even managed to virtually eliminate alcohol consumption in their communities, which has had a massively positive impact on public health:

Proclaimed as one of the greatest health achievements for the Zapatista movement, the eradication of both the manufacture and consumption of alcohol has significantly improved the health of all Zapatistas. This no-tolerance policy is directly linked to the reduction in many illnesses and infections including “úlceras, cirrosis, desnutrición y heridas con machete”.

Overall, the Zapatistas have made a number of tremendous strides in healthcare in their communities. The National University of Ireland, Cork remarks:

It is clear, as these figures demonstrate, that Zapatista healthcare has a profound impact on the quality of the lives of the many indigenous who attend autonomous healthcare services regularly... Zapatista autonomous healthcare has proven successful, in many respects, in reducing disease and promoting community independence. This approach to healthcare empowers communities to access resources and knowledge which have opened up unparalleled opportunities for survival amongst remote and isolated indigenous communities.

The World Health Organization notes:

This is a model which has proved able to have an impact on what one can call the primary level of health care, acting within an organized health structure and as part of a political project. Seen from that viewpoint, it has been able to insert into the scenario a methodology that the National Health Service has been unable or unwilling to develop.

These achievements have also succeeded in instilling a sense of dignity and pride into these communities, which had previously been so badly exploited. The National University of Ireland, Cork states:

As a result of autonomous healthcare, communities are now in control of their healthcare services and together they decide on local healthcare policy and the appointment of a suitable health promoter. Therefore, it is only natural that these communities develop a self-confidence and empowerment not felt before the widespread introduction of autonomous healthcare.

The healthcare achievements in Zapatista territories stand as some of the revolution's greatest accomplishments.

Education in Zapatista Territories

In addition to healthcare, the EZLN have also greatly improved the provision of education in their communities. Before the uprising, education was in a very poor state. The National University of Ireland, Cork notes:

Education in Chiapas was of a low standard and many of the statistics that follow substantiate this claim. According to Rovira (2000), 30% of children in Chiapas did not attend school while 6.5% of the Chiapan population were considered illiterate. Other critics, however, placed the illiteracy rate in Chiapas much higher, arguing that roughly 18% of the state's population lacked any form of basic education... In addition, further statistics released highlight the under-performance of those who have access to basic schooling. Only 10% of indigenous children complete primary level education in Chiapas. In direct contrast, 54% of children nationally attain the same standard of education

As the above statistics show, indigenous children were at a particular disadvantage. This is especially true because most teachers did not speak an indigenous language, thus impeding the ability of indigenous children to learn. State schools have often been accused of shaming indigenous children, with disastrous results:

Families feel anger and frustration because State education is "shaming them for being indigenous" and State-employed teachers accuse them of speaking "una lengua de perros", a demeaning

reference to the children's use of native indigenous languages. According to Castellanos (2014), alcohol abuse is prevalent in many pro-government communities and such high levels of consumption are linked to significantly high rates of suicide amongst young indigenous teenagers. It is claimed that many indigenous young people in these communities resort to excessive levels of alcohol consumption as a means of coping with the discrimination they experience in school. It is estimated that, on average, six attempted suicides take place each month amongst this cohort of young indigenous people living in pro-government communities.

By contrast, Zapatista schools have protected and assisted the indigenous:

Many observers of the Zapatista movement have noted that the indigenous uprising of 1994 brought about a momentous transformation and "re-signification of what it means to be indigenous" in modern-day Mexico. For pro-Zapatista communities these "sudden cultural changes" were experienced within the protective political and social framework of the Zapatista movement. Today, autonomous education encourages communities to celebrate their indigenous identities and welcomes the "re-evaluation of their culture [and] their language"... it is widely accepted that, through autonomous education, the Zapatista rebels have "sheltered Zapatista youth from the social changes" which have so severely impacted on those of whom are living outside the protective frameworks of the Zapatista movement.

The Zapatistas have greatly expanded the educational system in their territories, and have even begun to set up a second-tier to their educational system:

Over the years, autonomous education has expanded its reach throughout the region and, as a result, the rebels have started to develop a second tier in the education system. This slow and steady commitment to advance their education system demonstrates the important and respected position that education holds in the wider project of Zapatista autonomy.

While the Zapatista system remains focused principally on primary education, it has nonetheless succeeded in greatly improving access to education in the region. The National University of Ireland, Cork reports:

While primary education is available in all Zapatista communities, there are only five secondary schools in operation across the region, one constructed in each Caracol. Figures released in 2001 indicate that 37% of all Zapatista students are now steadily progressing towards second level education. Nevertheless, according to Barmeyer's (2008) observations, primary school remains the only educational service that is available in all indigenous communities in the autonomous territory. However, despite its rudimentary infrastructure and under-resourced classrooms, autonomous education is a finely tuned system designed precisely to deliver the objectives the Zapatistas expected of it.

The Zapatista educational system is not only focused on classroom learning; it also helps local young people to learn the necessary skills to run and sustain a community:

Zapatista students regularly attend lessons in agriculture and environmental sustainability, learning about viable farming techniques which help protect the environment and assist in maximizing local farmers' limited agricultural resources. Nowadays, young farmers are learning to plant vines in their fields as a way of suffocating and reducing the spread of weeds on their lands. It is a practice that returns nutrients to the soil and makes ready the fields for consecutive agricultural seasons. Prior to the introduction of this unique farming method, many farmers failed to protect their fields and often burned weeds, thus eliminating all possibility of "enriching the ground with nutrients and nitrogen". Education of this kind is a means of safeguarding and securing the growth of vital crops which are important for supporting community inhabitants and their local economies.

All of this information demonstrates that the Zapatistas have greatly improved educational access in their communities.

Women's Rights and Anti-Racism in Zapatista Communities

Another important advance made by the Zapatistas is the improvement in gender relations in their communities. A major factor in this has been the banning of alcohol, which has greatly reduced levels of domestic violence. The National University of Ireland, Cork reports:

Women were often bartered in return for alcohol and social relations between the genders often amounted to no more than men treating women like "domestic animals". Now, with their complete rejection of alcohol, the Zapatistas can claim a significant improvement in gender relations, with women now challenging "the traditional order" of gender roles in communities. Removing alcohol from Zapatista life has both improved health and "soften[ed] human relations" considerably.

Democratic community participation has also played a role, as people in each community are free to openly discuss problems of gender relations and sexual violence:

In a community healthcare debate witnessed by the author, Villarreal (2007) asserts that the issue of sexual health dominated the discussions at a community assembly. This demonstrates the liberty communities have in tackling the health problems that confront their village and the freedom to do so on their terms.

The EZLN have taken an active approach to fighting patriarchy. In 2018, the Zapatistas organized an event entirely by, and for, women. Waging Nonviolence reports:

"What we wanted was to meet many women," said Commander Jenny, who coordinated the event. "We thought that only a few women were going to come, so we are very happy to see how many of

you have joined us here." Although only her eyes were visible, a smile was detectable behind her black balaclava. "It has been hard work, but we are very pleased to see that there are many other women who are fighting patriarchy." [...] The event was not only an opportunity to create educational or professional networks, but also a space to consider one's health and well-being as a woman in the fight for justice. There were activities ranging from workshops, discussion panels and movie screenings to theater performances, art exhibitions and sports events, including basketball and soccer matches. Themes included gender violence, self-defense, self-care, sexism in the media, sexual rights, health and education, misogyny and childhood, discrimination against indigenous LGBTQ communities, women environmental rights defenders, and decolonization. All of the activities were led and held by women, and all of them were aimed at generating consciousness of gender inequality or the restoration of women's self-confidence and autonomy.

The EZLN connect their fight against patriarchy and racism to the struggle against capitalism:

"Capitalism is not only colonial, it is also patriarchal and racist," said Fernanda Esquivel, a 20-year-old student from Guadalajara. "To come here and see that the Zapatistas are still resisting and have resisted for so many years is a huge inspiration for me. Being with so many women and feeling united also makes me feel hopeful about really creating a change. In academia there is nothing that can show you what it is like to come here, and to feel and share these experiences in practice."

The Zapatistas have implemented their Revolutionary Law to fight against gender oppression and other forms of bigotry:

Many followers of the Zapatista revolution were not aware of the key elements that formed the movement before going public in 1994. Undeniably, one of the key characteristics that shaped the movement was the "Women's Revolutionary Law," passed by the Zapatista committees in 1992.

For Sylvia Marcos, a sociologist and expert on indigenous movements across the Americas, the emphasis on women's rights is a defining factor for the organization. Furthermore, she indicates that these rights were claimed not solely for women as individuals, but were "fully linked and interwoven with collective rights."

Overall, it is clear that the EZLN have taken a firm stance against patriarchy, racism, and other forms of discrimination.

Successful Anarchists?

Finally, it should be noted that, despite the excited claims of numerous anarchists, the Zapatistas are *not* an anarchist group. In fact, they explicitly reject the label (source below). In addition, they use imagery from the Cuban Revolution (particularly Che Guevara), and Marxist concepts appear frequently in the writings of major figures in the Zapatista movement,

including the group's *de facto* spokesman, Subcomandante Marcos (now known as Subcomandante Galeano).

Conclusion

The EZLN have managed numerous great achievements since their uprising in 1994; the recent expansion of their territory lends hope that their revolution will grow and improve. While they have not yet succeeded in establishing developed socialism, their existing achievements are already enough to guarantee them a place in the history of great proletarian and anti-imperialist revolutionary movements.

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Essays on Socialism in Asia

Masterpost on the People's Republic of China

Introduction

The People's Republic of China is the most populous nation on Earth, and one of only four officially Marxist-Leninist states in the world today (alongside Vietnam, Laos, and Cuba). Over the last few years it has emerged as the world's [leading economic power](#), and as a result has been subjected to near-constant demonization from Western media and propaganda outlets. In order to gain a proper understanding of the PRC, and to distinguish legitimate points of criticism (of which there are many) from Sinophobic slanders, it is necessary to go over the history, economy, and development of the country. As always, all sources are cited at the end.

Pre-Communist China

Before going over the revolutionary and post-revolutionary periods in China, it is necessary to understand what the country was like before the People's Republic was declared in 1949. According to a [study](#) in the *Journal of Global Health*, China at this time was "one of the most impoverished nations on Earth." To quote:

After a century of domination by Europeans, the fall of the Qing Empire was followed by partial Japanese occupation and a 38-year civil war. The vast majority of the population were engaged in subsistence agriculture, and a survey on the causes of death conducted in 1929-31 revealed that more than half of all deaths were caused by infectious diseases.

In a [book](#) on China and India, Nobel-winning economist Amartya Sen (Harvard University) notes that pre-communist China suffered from "high levels of mortality, undernutrition, and illiteracy." According to a [study](#) from the London School of Economics:

Western visitors to China in the 1920s and 1930s paint a picture where land scarcity is the predominant cause of high levels of hunger and poverty. Famines were widespread and severe and periods of hunger were a fact of life for many Chinese peasants. Ownership of land was highly unequal. The best estimates from this period suggest that, taken together, landlords (who were rich enough to avoid doing agricultural labor) and rich peasants (who did agricultural labor but also relied heavily on tenants and hire labor) typically owned upward of half the land though their share in the population typically did not exceed 10 percent. Poor peasants and agricultural laborers who owned little or no land formed the majority of the population.

Educational standards in Kuomintang China were horrible. According to a [study](#) in the journal *Population Studies*, in 1949 "more than 80 per cent of China's population was illiterate. Enrollment rates in primary and middle schools were abysmal: 20 and 6 per cent, respectively." In addition, women's rights were highly curtailed and patriarchal norms were widespread; according to a [study](#) in the journal *Modern China*, this trend continued as Kuomintang rule took root in Taiwan. All-in-all, KMT China can be safely said to have been one of the poorest societies in the world, plagued by starvation, patriarchy, and feudal oppression.

The Maoist Period (1949-1976)

After the PRC's founding was declared in 1949 (an event captured on [film](#), for those who are interested), the Communists quickly set to work implementing their new agenda. According to the aforementioned [study](#) in the *Journal of Global Health*:

The Communists were quick to make good on promises of land-reform and establishment of a national "people's" government. In 1950 a Marriage Law was enacted, providing equal rights for women, and the first National Health Congress established a focus on rural health, disease prevention through campaigns, and collaboration between western and traditional Chinese medicine.

According to the aforementioned [study](#) from the London School of Economics, the land reforms "led to the destruction of feudal power relationships in agriculture," leading to "universal and egalitarian access to land within localities." The reforms also led to a dramatic reduction in poverty and hunger. To quote:

Mao's legacy of universal and egalitarian access to land represents a key means of avoiding hunger. This helps us to understand how China has managed to escape the high levels of hunger which typify low income countries.

Health outcomes improved dramatically after the Communists took power. To quote from the *Journal of Global Health*:

China's progress on communicable disease control (CDC) in the 30 years after establishment of the People's Republic in 1949 is widely regarded as remarkable. Life expectancy soared by around 30 years, infant mortality plummeted and smallpox, sexually transmitted diseases and many other infections were either eliminated or decreased massively in incidence, largely as a result of CDC.

The aforementioned [study](#) in *Population Studies*, confirms these findings, noting that "China's growth in life expectancy between 1950 and 1980 ranks as among the most rapid sustained increases in documented global history." Another [study](#), this one from the journal *Health Services Evaluation*, makes similar observations:

The health of China's population improved dramatically during the first 30 years of the People's Republic, established in 1949. By the mid-1970s, China was already undergoing the epidemiologic transition, years ahead of other nations of similar economic status, and by 1980, life expectancy (67 years) exceeded that of most similarly low-income nations by 7 years.

According to the *Journal of Global Health*, these improvements "can be attributed to population mobilization, mass campaigns and a focus on sanitation, hygiene, clean water and clean delivery," as well as "clinical care and continuing public health programs to the masses through community-funded medical schemes and the establishment of community-based health workers."

Education also improved dramatically in the Maoist era. According to the aforementioned [study](#) in *Population Studies*:

China made large strides in primary and secondary education under Mao. [...] During the 1950s, capital investments in primary and secondary school infrastructure increased tenfold, and dramatic increases in attendance followed. Primary school enrolment rates rose to 80 per cent by 1958 and to 97 per cent by 1975, and secondary school rates increased to 46 per cent by 1977.

Amartya Sen makes similar observations, noting that literacy was greatly expanded under Mao:

China's breakthrough in the field of elementary education had already taken place before the process of economic reform was initiated at the end of the seventies. Census data indicate, for instance, that literacy rates in 1982 for the 15-19 age group were already as high as 96 percent for males and 85 percent for females.

These achievements of the Maoist era made possible China's later economic miracle. Sen states that "the accomplishments relating to education, healthcare, land reforms, and social change in the pre-reform [Maoist] period made significantly positive contributions to the achievements of the post-reform period. This is so not only in terms of their role in sustained high life expectancy and related achievements, but also in providing firm support for economic expansion based on market reforms." In his aforementioned [book](#) on the topic, Sen summarizes the achievements of the Maoist period thusly:

Because of its radical commitment to the elimination of poverty and to improving living conditions - a commitment in which Maoist as well as Marxist ideas and ideals played an important part - China did achieve many things... [including] The elimination of widespread hunger, illiteracy, and ill health... [a] remarkable reduction in chronic undernourishment... a dramatic reduction of infant and child mortality and a remarkable expansion of longevity.

Of course, with all of this said, it should not be denied that the Maoist era saw some extremely serious problems. Most notable is the Great Leap Forward, which was a colossal failure, contributing to the Great Chinese Famine. A [study](#) in the *Journal of Health Economics* notes that the famine had major long-term effects on health and economic development in China, leading to reduced population height, and having a negative impact on labor supply and

earnings of famine survivors. Even still, it cannot be denied that the Maoist period brought massive gains to the Chinese people, massively improving health, education, and nutrition, and laying the groundwork for China's later economic development.

Socialism with Chinese Characteristics

In 1978, in response to a perceived lack of necessary economic progress, the Communist Party of China embarked on an ambitious reform program, leading to the development of socialism with Chinese characteristics (SWCC). These reform programs have produced impressive results; according to a 2020 [study](#) in the *Journal of Economic Issues*:

Succinctly, in terms of economic development, the model has simultaneously achieved the following, all on unprecedented scales, particularly since the turn of the century: rapid expansion in both investment and consumption, rapid rises in both productivity and the wage rate, and rapid increases in job creation. All these have provided the necessary material conditions for broader social development: the fundamental enhancement of the power of labor, the reconstruction of a publicly-funded comprehensive healthcare system, and the acceleration of the process of urbanization.

Despite these achievements, many leftists take little-or-no interest in SWCC, arguing that it is simply a form of "state capitalism." However, this ignores the reality of how China's economy is really structured. According to a [book](#) from the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER), "China is not copying free market institutions, but trying something substantially different: market socialism with Chinese characteristics is a genuinely unique system." The accuracy of this assessment becomes clear when one looks at the Chinese economic system in more detail. In her [book](#) *The Transformation of Chinese Socialism*, political scientist Lin Chun (London School of Economics) lists some of the key characteristics of the Chinese economy:

[Including] the relatively strong "human capital," accumulated through decades (including in the pre-reform period) of investment in basic needs, public education and health care; state and rural collective ownership of the land; the dominant public sector that retains the nation's strategic industries; government sponsorship of trade and technology transfer; state regulation of the movement of foreign capital, major financial transactions, and currency exchange; coordination between the center and provinces in fiscal and tax management, public spending, and developing regional comparative advantages; booming township and village enterprises (TVES); a countrywide increase in household incomes (including remittances sent home by migrant workers) and, therefore, a "consuming revolution" of a major increase in consumption.

These characteristics (particularly the abolition of private ownership in land, the "dominant public sector," and state control of trade and foreign capital) are clearly not those of a

capitalist economy, and instead point towards China pursuing a socialist model of development.

In a 2016 [article](#), published in the journal *International Critical Thought*, Marxist philosopher Domenico Losurdo said the following:

After the tragedy of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, it took Deng Xiaoping to emphasize that socialism implies the development of the productive forces. Chinese market socialism has achieved extraordinary success.

For those who remain unconvinced, I would remind them of what Lenin said in his [pamphlet](#) *The Impending Catastrophe and How to Combat It*:

*[Given] a really revolutionary-democratic state, state-monopoly capitalism inevitably and unavoidably implies a step, and more than one step, towards socialism! For if a huge capitalist undertaking becomes a monopoly, it means that it serves the whole nation. If it has become a state monopoly, it means that the state (i.e., the armed organization of the population, the workers and peasants above all, provided there is revolutionary democracy) directs the whole undertaking. In whose interest? Either in the interest of the landowners and capitalists, in which case we have not a revolutionary-democratic, but a reactionary-bureaucratic state, an imperialist republic. Or in the interest of revolutionary democracy—and then it is a step towards socialism. **For socialism is merely the next step forward from state-capitalist monopoly. Or, in other words, socialism is merely state-capitalist monopoly which is made to serve the interests of the whole people and has to that extent ceased to be capitalist monopoly.***

This perfectly describes the situation in the People's Republic of China: while there are capitalists and markets, they are under the constant control of the Communist Party and the proletarian state. In addition, state-owned enterprises continue to play an essential role in the Chinese economy, as we will now see.

The Continued Role of Public Ownership

Contrary to the popular perception that China's growth has been the result of a transition to capitalism, the evidence shows that public ownership continues to play a key growth-driving role in the PRC's economy. According to the [book](#) *The Basic Economic System of China* (authored by a group of prominent Chinese economists), a majority of operating assets in the Chinese economic are publicly owned:

The total amount of operating assets in the three sectors of the economy in China was 489.64 trillion yuan (including self-employed businesses and excluding nonoperating assets) by 2012, as described

above, among which 262.39 trillion, or 53.58%, was publicly owned. The size of non-operating assets that is publicly-owned is also considerable as we are, after all, a socialist country.

This makes the matter quite clear: far from being pushed to the side by private capital, public ownership remains dominant in the Chinese economy, having retained control over the commanding heights of the economy.

Growth and Poverty Reduction Under SWCC

Having discussed the nature of SWCC, we can now look into some of its achievements. To begin with, poverty in the PRC has been dramatically reduced. According to a 2019 [report](#) from Philip Alston (UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights):

China's achievements in alleviating extreme poverty in recent years, and in meeting highly ambitious targets for improving social well-being, have been extraordinary. [...] Over the past three decades, and with particular speed in recent years, China has lifted hundreds of millions of people out of poverty. This is a staggering achievement and is a credit to those responsible.

Similarly, a 2020 [study](#) in the *China Economic Review* notes that income growth has been "widely shared nationwide," resulting in "substantial, ongoing rural poverty reduction" throughout the country. A major milestone was reached with the recent announcement (acknowledged in Western media outlets, such as [CNN](#)) that the last poverty-stricken counties in China have been delisted, "leaving no county in a state of absolute poverty countrywide."

Malnutrition has continued to decline massively in China over the last several decades. According to the University of Oxford's Our World in Data project, China now has a [lower rate](#) of death from malnutrition than the United States, despite having a significantly lower GDP-per-capita.

Economic growth has also increased dramatically. According to a [study](#) from the National Bureau of Economic Research, "reforms yielded a significant growth and structural transformation differential. GDP growth is 4.2 percentage points higher and the share of the labor force in agriculture is 23.9 percentage points lower compared with the continuation of the pre-1978 policies." These results are remarkably impressive, and indicate that SWCC has been successful at its principal goals of developing China's productive forces and meeting the needs of the proletariat.

Healthcare in Modern China

In the Maoist period, China built one of the developing world's most robust public healthcare systems, based on rural primary care, barefoot doctors, and regular mass campaigns, known

as "patriotic health campaigns." Since the beginning of the reform period, China's healthcare system has gone through a number of phases. After an unfortunate period of regression and privatization, China has spent the last decade making rapid progress towards a new universal healthcare system. A 2020 [study](#) in the *British Medical Journal (BMJ)* summarizes many of the goals and programs of China's recent health reforms:

The government has increased investment in primary care, with initiatives that include strengthening the infrastructure of primary healthcare (PHC) facilities, expanding human resources for primary care through incentives and supporting projects, establishing a general practitioner system and improving the capacity of PHC personnel through training and education, such as general practice training and continuous medical education programmes. [...] This policy seeks to achieve universal availability and promote a more equitable provision of basic health services to all urban and rural citizens.

The study goes on to note that China has made significant progress towards meeting its reform goals, and building a developed and equitable universal healthcare system: During the past 10 years since the latest round of healthcare reform, China made steady progress in achieving the reform goals and UHC [i.e. universal health coverage].

Another [paper](#), also from the *BMJ*, summarizes the recent improvements in China's health outcomes, as well as access to, and cost of, healthcare:

The results include the following: out-of-pocket expenditures as a percentage of current health expenditures in China have dropped dramatically from 60.13% in 2000 to 35.91% in 2016; the health insurance coverage of the total population jumped from 22.1% in 2003 to 95.1% in 2013; the average life expectancy increased from 72.0 to 76.4, maternal mortality dropped from 59 to 29 per 100 000 live births, the under-5 mortality rate dropped from 36.8 to 9.3 per 1000 live births, and neonatal mortality dropped from 21.4 to 4.7 per 1000 live births between 2000 and 2017; and so on.

In short, while China's healthcare system is not perfect, it is certainly moving in the right direction. As with many other aspects of China's socialist construction, this provides a model for other developing nations; according to the aforementioned *BMJ* study:

The lessons learnt from China could help other nations improve UHC in sustainable and adaptive ways, including continued political support, increased health financing and a strong PHC system as basis. The experience of the rapid development of UHC in China can provide a valuable mode for countries (mainly LMICs) planning their own path further on in the UHC journey.

This is another benefit of China's rise to prominence on the world stage. China demonstrates to the world that it is possible for a desperately poor country to rise from poverty, develop its economy, and meet the needs of its people.

Democracy and Popular Opinion in China

Polls conducted by Western researchers have consistently found that the Chinese people have a high level of support for their government, and for the Communist Party. A 2020 [analysis](#) by the China Data Lab (based at UC San Diego) found that support for the government has been increasing as of late. Similar results were found in a 2016 [survey](#) done by Harvard University's Ash Center:

In 2016, the last year the survey was conducted, 95.5 percent of respondents were either "relatively satisfied" or "highly satisfied" with Beijing. In contrast to these findings, Gallup reported in January of this year that their latest polling on U.S. citizen satisfaction with the American federal government revealed only 38 percent of respondents were satisfied with the federal government.

It is worth noting that the Chinese people are much less satisfied with local government than they are with the central government. Still, these results disprove the common notion that the Chinese people are ruled by an iron fisted regime that they do not want. Indeed, one official from the Ash Center noted that their findings "run counter to the general idea that these people are marginalized and disfavored by policies." As he states:

We tend to forget that for many in China, and in their lived experience of the past four decades, each day was better than the next.

In addition, most Chinese people are satisfied with the level of democracy in the PRC. A 2018 [study](#) in the *International Political Science Review* notes that "surveys suggest that the majority of Chinese people feel satisfied with the level of democracy in China." However, the study notes that "people who hold liberal democratic values" are more likely to be dissatisfied with the state of democracy in China. By contrast, those who hold a "substantive" view of democracy (i.e. one based on the idea that the state should focus on providing for the material needs of the people) are more satisfied.

While the Chinese government contains authoritarian elements, it also has elements of genuine democracy. An example of this may be found in the National People's Congress, China's primary legislative body. While Western media has typically labeled the NPC as a simple rubberstamping body for the Central Committee, the facts indicate that this is not entirely true. A 2016 [study](#) in the *Journal of Legislative Studies* found that the NPC "is no longer a minimal or 'rubber-stamp' legislature," noting that "the NPC does play an important role in the whole political system, especially in legislation, though the NPC has typically been under the control of China's Communist Party."

Many of the other claims surrounding authoritarianism in China are highly overblown, to say the least. For instance, an [article](#) in *Foreign Policy* notes that the Chinese social credit system was massively exaggerated and distorted in Western media. An [article](#) in the publication *Wired* discusses how many of these overblown perceptions came to be. None of this is to suggest that China is a perfect democracy, with zero flaws; it certainly has issues relating to transparency, treatment of prisoners, etc. That being said, it is far from the totalitarian nightmare that imperialist media generally depicts it as being.

Chinese "Imperialism" and the Belt and Road Initiative

China is often accused (typically by Western pseudo-leftists) of being an "imperialist" state, due primarily to its investments in Africa, as part of the Belt and Road Initiative. These critics ignore the actual views of the African people themselves, who [overwhelmingly approve](#) of China's role in their economic development. In addition, the extent of Chinese involvement in Africa is smaller than often believed; according to a 2019 [paper](#) from the Center for Economic Policy Research, "China's influence in Africa is much smaller than is generally believed, though its engagement on the continent is increasing. Chinese investment in Africa, while less extensive than often assumed, has the potential to generate jobs and development on the continent."

A 2018 [study](#) in the *Review of Development Finance* also found that Chinese investment in Africa raises incomes in the African nations that receive the investment, in a similar way to foreign investments by other nations. The author state that these results "suggest that the win-win deal China claims when investing in Africa may hold, and Chinese investment contributes to growth in Africa. Put differently, Chinese investment is mutually beneficial for both China and Africa."

For those interested in learning more, the economist Yanis Varoufakis discussed the topic in a recent [lecture](#) given at the Cambridge forum.

Conclusion

The People's Republic of China is undoubtedly the world's leading socialist state, and it is essential for all socialists to understand it. While there are many legitimate criticisms that one can make of China (from past economic errors to current human rights violations), it has made enormous progress in improving life for the people, as well as providing investments in developing countries in a mutually beneficial way. For this, it deserves the respect of all socialists and communists.

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The East is (Still) Red: China as a Socialist State

Introduction

It has become increasingly common in recent years to argue that the People's Republic of China (PRC) is no longer socialist, due to the market reforms that were put into place during the leadership of Deng Xiaoping (which continue to the present day). It is claimed that the proclamations of the Communist Party of China (which has always maintained that the country is socialist) are merely an ideological smokescreen, designed to cover up their supposed embrace of capitalist economics. However, an examination of the facts quickly reveals this

view to be erroneous; the PRC is still a socialist country, albeit of a different sort than it once was. As always, all sources are listed at the end.

Economic Analysis

To begin with, it helps to examine the actual economic system of China, in order to determine how it functions, the respective role of state and private industry, market mechanisms and planning, etc. According to a [book](#) from the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER):

China is not copying free market institutions, but trying something substantially different: market socialism with Chinese characteristics is a genuinely unique system... its heart remains resolutely socialist: strategically placed state-owned enterprises (SOEs), SOE-controlled pyramidal business groups, and ubiquitous party cells, party Secretaries, and party committees leave Lenin's "commanding heights" firmly and exclusively under the control of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), and consign much of the rest to provincial and local party cadres.

The PRC still has markets and private owners, but they are firmly regulated by the Communist Party, and are subject to state planning. According to a [study](#) in the journal *Modern China*: China's planning system has been transformed alongside the economic transition, yet remains central to almost all domains of public policy making and the political institutions that have fostered China's high-speed growth and economic stability.

In addition, a majority of the nation's productive assets are owned by the state. According to the [book](#) *The Basic Economic System of China* (authored by a group of prominent Chinese economists):

The total amount of operating assets in the three sectors of the economy in China was 489.64 trillion yuan (including self-employed businesses and excluding nonoperating assets) by 2012, as described above, among which 262.39 trillion, or 53.58%, was publicly owned. The size of non-operating assets that is publicly-owned is also considerable as we are, after all, a socialist country.

The accuracy of this assessment becomes clear when one looks at the Chinese economic system in more detail. In her [book](#) *The Transformation of Chinese Socialism*, political scientist Lin Chun (London School of Economics) lists some of the key characteristics of the Chinese economy:

[Including] the relatively strong "human capital," accumulated through decades (including in the pre-reform period) of investment in basic needs, public education and health care; state and rural collective ownership of the land; the dominant public sector that retains the nation's strategic industries; government sponsorship of trade and technology transfer; state regulation of the

movement of foreign capital, major financial transactions, and currency exchange; coordination between the center and provinces in fiscal and tax management, public spending, and developing regional comparative advantages; booming township and village enterprises (TVES); a countrywide increase in household incomes (including remittances sent home by migrant workers) and, therefore, a "consuming revolution" of a major increase in consumption.

After the chaos of the late-Maoist period, the economic reforms were a necessary corrective measure, in order to bring about prosperity and develop the productive forces. In a 2016 [article](#), published in the journal *International Critical Thought*, Marxist philosopher Domenico Losurdo said the following:

After the tragedy of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, it took Deng Xiaoping to emphasize that socialism implies the development of the productive forces. Chinese market socialism has achieved extraordinary success.

From this, we can see that the commanding heights of the economy remain under public ownership, with state-ownership and planning continuing to play a crucial role in the Chinese economy. With that said, we should now turn to Marxist theory, and make an analysis from that perspective.

Marxist Theory and China

The Communist Party of China still employs Marxism-Leninism as its guiding worldview. This is made clear in a [speech](#) by Xi Jinping, in which he lays out the continued role of Marxist political economy in the ideology of the Communist Party, stressing the importance of adapting to China's material conditions (Marxism is based on dialectical and historical materialism, after all). To quote:

The purpose of studying Marxist political economy is to better lead China's economic development. While we must ensure that we uphold its basic principles and methodology, it is even more important that we integrate Marxist political economy with the realities of our nation's economic development, and constantly strive toward new theoretical achievements in the process.

While many people have claimed that China cannot be a revolutionary state due to the continued existence of capitalists, this is a simple misunderstanding of what Marx and Engels wrote. These people assume that immediately after the revolution (when the dictatorship of the proletariat is established), the people will take control of the means of production, thus abolishing the capitalist class. In actuality, this process happens much more gradually. Engels addresses this issue in his 1847 work [The Principles of Communism](#). In response to the question "will it be possible for private property be abolished at one stroke," Engels writes:

*No, no more than existing forces of production can at one stroke be multiplied to the extent necessary for the creation of a communal society. **In all probability, the proletarian revolution will transform existing society gradually and will be able to abolish private property only when the means of production are available in sufficient quantity.***

He then goes on to list a number of measures which the DotP will need to implement after the revolution, including:

(ii) Gradual expropriation of landowners, industrialists, railroad magnates and shipowners, partly through competition by state industry, partly directly through compensation in the form of bonds. [...] (iv) Organization of labor or employment of proletarians on publicly owned land, in factories and workshops, with competition among the workers being abolished and with the factory owners, in so far as they still exist, being obliged to pay the same high wages as those paid by the state.

From this, we can see that Engels clearly assumes the continued existence of the capitalist class for at least some period of time after the revolution. During this time, the state will gradually expand its role in production, developing the productive forces, and regulating the conduct of the remaining capitalists. This is what the Communist Party of China refers to as "the primary stage of socialism."

In addition, we can take our analysis of the Chinese economic system (i.e. the socialist market economy), and compare it to what Lenin said in his [pamphlet](#) *The Impending Catastrophe and How to Combat It*:

*You will find that, given a really revolutionary-democratic state, state-monopoly capitalism inevitably and unavoidably implies a step, and more than one step, towards socialism! For if a huge capitalist undertaking becomes a monopoly, it means that it serves the whole nation. If it has become a state monopoly, it means that the state (i.e., the armed organization of the population, the workers and peasants above all, provided there is revolutionary democracy) directs the whole undertaking. In whose interest? Either in the interest of the landowners and capitalists, in which case we have not a revolutionary-democratic, but a reactionary-bureaucratic state, an imperialist republic. Or in the interest of revolutionary democracy—and then it is a step towards socialism. **For socialism is merely the next step forward from state-capitalist monopoly. Or, in other words, socialism is merely state-capitalist monopoly which is made to serve the interests of the whole people and has to that extent ceased to be capitalist monopoly.***

This perfectly describes the situation in the People's Republic of China: while there are capitalists and markets, they are under the constant control of the Communist Party and the proletarian state. In addition, state-owned enterprises continue to play an essential role in the Chinese economy.

In addition, it should be noted that all of this is well-within the purview of Mao Zedong Thought. Mao never said that the capitalist class would be immediately eliminated; rather, he took a more complex view of their role. To quote from his 1926 [Analysis of the Classes in Chinese Society](#):

The leading force in our revolution is the industrial proletariat. Our closest friends are the entire semi-proletariat and petty bourgeoisie. As for the vacillating middle bourgeoisie, their right-wing may become our enemy and their left-wing may become our friend -- but we must be constantly on our guard and not let them create confusion within our ranks.

In other words, the petit bourgeoisie and middle bourgeoisie may be either friends or enemies of the revolutionary government, depending on their level of political and ideological development. It would be naïve to assume that "Mao would have purged the capitalists," and blame the continued existence of private owners (a historical necessity) on some alleged ideological defect in the Communist Party.

Conclusion

From this analysis of the Chinese economic system, as well as the relevant theoretical writings from various Marxist thinkers, it is clear that the People's Republic of China remains a socialist state, even despite the market reforms that have guided its economic trajectory for the last forty years. Those who claim it to be "state capitalist" or some other such thing are merely demonstrating their lack of proper analysis, and their willingness to buy into slander and distortions.

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Analysis of the Naxalite Movement and Its Achievements, With Sources

Introduction

Of all the various socialist and communist groups currently waging armed struggle against capitalism and imperialism, few are more significant and well-known than the Maoist movement of India, commonly known as the Naxalites. Frequently demonized and portrayed as terrorists, they have nonetheless continued to struggle (with remarkable success, as will be shown shortly) against the ruthless exploitation and murder of the poorest people on Earth.

Before diving into the hard analysis, I would recommend that you all read *Walking With the Comrades* by Arundhati Roy, a brilliant analysis of the situation in India, as well as a first-hand account of Roy's time visiting the Maoists. She is one of the most well-known authors in the world today, and her work is generally accepted and acclaimed even by liberal taste-makers; she even succeeded in winning some positive attention for the Naxalites in mainstream publications, such as the *Paris Review*:

- [The Paris Review | Arundhati Roy on "Walking With the Comrades"](#)

If you want to understand the horrific exploitation and state terrorism which has made the Naxalite movement necessary in the first place, read that book. With that out of the way, let us dive into the achievements of the Naxalite movement.

Economic Issues and Quality of Life (Land, Wages, Healthcare, etc.)

One of our most important sources on this topic comes, ironically enough, from the Indian government itself. Their report, entitled "Development Challenges in Extremist Affected Areas", gives us a great deal of information on the successes of the Naxalites:

- [Indian Planning Commission | Development Challenges in Extremist Affected Areas](#)

The government acknowledges the immense problem of unequal land distribution, while also admitting that the Naxalites have done a great deal to redistribute land to the landless: Though no precise estimates are available, it is a fact that in some cases the Naxalite movement has succeeded in helping the landless to occupy a substantial extent of government land, whether for homesteads or for cultivation. In Bihar all the Naxalite parties have attempted to assist, in their respective areas of influence, the landless Musahars, the lowest among the dalits, to take possession of a sizable extent of such land. They have fought to end the ruthless exploitation of adivasi (indigenous) labor:

Naxalites have secured increases in the rate of payment for the picking of tendu leaf which is used for rolling beedies, in the forest areas of Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Orissa, Maharashtra, and Jharkhand. This was a very major source of exploitation of adivasi labor, and while the Government knowingly ignored it, the Naxalites put an effective end to it. The exploitation was so severe that the rates have over the years increased up to fifty times what the tendu patta contractors used to pay before the Naxalites stepped in.

The Naxalites have also fought to increase wages in general, with significant success: The Minimum Wages Act remains an act on paper in much of rural India... In the areas of their activity, it is reported that Naxalites have ensured payment of decent wage rates, though they have not usually gone by the statutory minimum wage rates. The rates they have ensured are sometimes higher and sometimes lower than the statutory rate. Their orientation to rights is in general not governed by statutory entitlement but what they regard as just and fair, taking all factors that they believe to be relevant into consideration.

There are also large areas of labor not governed by the Minimum Wages Act... Since the Naxalites are in any case not bothered whether or not there is a law governing the right they are espousing, they have intervened and determined fair wage rates in their perception in all labor processes in their areas of influence. This includes wages for washing clothes, making pots, tending cattle, repairing implements, etc.

The Naxalites have also fought to ensure the protection of common property, and to prevent its exploitation by private owners:

Enjoyment of common property resources as a traditional right by cattle-herds, fishing communities, toddy toppers, stone workers, has become vulnerable due to the appropriation of these resources by the dominant sections of society or by the others with their support. The Naxalites have tried to ensure the protection of this right wherever they are active.

Pressure from the Naxalites has forced government officials in the fields of health and education to properly carry out their duties to the people:

On some occasions the Naxalites have been able to put pressure upon lower level administrators to perform their job effectively. The pressure exerted by the Naxalite movement has had some effect in ensuring proper attendance of teachers, doctors etc.

Indeed, the Naxalites themselves have succeeded in improving healthcare in the areas where they are active. In his book *Hello, Bastar: The Untold Story of India's Maoist Movement*, Rahul Pandita (winner of the International Red Cross Award) writes:

In the field of health as well, the Maoists often fill in large gaps left by the state. Their mobile medical units cover large distances to offer primary health care to tribals... Various training camps are held regularly on preventive measures against diseases such as diarrhea or malaria. The grass-root doctors in the medical squads can administer vaccines, identify a number of diseases through symptoms, and treat injuries that are not severe. Some can even conduct simple blood tests to arrive at a diagnosis. This is a significant advantage in such areas.

It is clearly the case that the Naxalites have made large strides in improving quality of life for the people in the areas in which they operate.

Social Issues (Race, Gender, Forced Labor, etc.)

The Naxalites have made enormously positive and important achievements in terms of ending discrimination and fighting social oppression. Let us turn to the Indian government's report for more information.

As mentioned above, the Naxalites have fought discrimination against adivasis (indigenous people):

Wherever there is a basis for discretion on the part of government officials, forest personnel have had to be appeased in different ways to avoid harassment. It was only after the Naxalites entered the picture that the adivasis got protection from this harassment, which was well known to the administration but was normally ignored.

The Naxalites have also done a great deal to combat caste and gender oppression, which remains a major issue in India. This includes putting an end to sexual exploitation of working-class women by upper-caste men:

Impolite forms of address that the dalits were subjected to, and the prohibition in the matter of wearing clean clothes and footwear in the presence of upper castes, or while passing through their localities, and the compulsion to address them as dora or malik and other such oppressive practices, have by and large been brought to an end in their areas of work. The everyday humiliation and sexual exploitation of laboring women of dalit communities by upper caste men is another form of oppression that has been successfully fought.

In Bihar there have been many instances where dalits suffering social oppression, and in recent times victims of the massacres perpetrated by the caste senas such as Ranbir Sena. The victims have received that help from the Naxalites.

One of their most important achievements is putting an end to forced labor in rural communities, which flourished for decades:

There is no law penalizing forced labor in other forms. Therefore it flourished in the most medieval forms in the Telangana district in Karimnagar, and it took a major upsurge led by the Naxalites in the late seventies and early eighties of the last century to put an end to it.

Crucially, the Naxalites have also succeeded in deterring forced eviction and seizure of natural resources by the Indian government, as well as private corporations:

The forest dwellers (were) perpetually on the brink of eviction from their own habitat... The fear of Naxalite armed resistance deterred the repressive and depredatory moves of the authorities.

Perhaps the most inspiring of all these achievements is the sense of pride, humanity, and empowerment which the Naxalites have instilled in the people. This is acknowledged even by the Indian government:

Apart from the concrete issues undertaken by the Naxalites against social oppression, the fact that the cadre and also most of local leaders of the Naxalite organisations consist of poor villagers of castes looked upon as lowly has endowed the oppressed with much strength. A sense of powerlessness is a characteristic of the psychological make up of oppressed classes. The typical Naxalite cadre, however, is a confident (most probably gun-wielding) teenager from those very classes. To see young boys and girls of their own villages and their own class/caste active in the Naxalite movement, and wielding power over the 'big' men of the village and the high and mighty tahsildar has given a sense of empowerment to the oppressed that has inestimable value.

Conclusion

Despite the enormous propaganda campaign directed against them, as well as the utterly vicious and violent response from the Indian government (documented in Arundhati Roy's aforementioned *Walking With the Comrades*), the Naxalite movement has succeeded in making great strides for the people. Perhaps this is best summarized by the Indian government itself, in a comment from the report:

The movement does provide protection to the weak against the powerful, and takes the security of, and justice for, the weak and the socially marginal seriously.

In one of the poorest and most exploited nations on Earth, that itself is a major achievement, and something to be treasured.

Essays on Africa

Imperialism, Slavery, and Underdevelopment in Africa

"[The] association of wealth with whites and poverty with blacks is not accidental. It is the nature of the imperialist relationship that enriches the metropolis at the expense of the colony, i.e. it makes the whites richer and the blacks poorer." - Walter Rodney, "The Groundings With My Brothers"

Introduction

Over the years, many people have pondered why Africa is so much poorer than the West, and what (if anything) can be done to ameliorate its conditions. Unfortunately, their analyses are often lacking in the critical, anti-imperialist perspective that is necessary to properly understand both the current poverty of the Africa, and the wealth of the United States and Europe. In order to better our comprehension, it is necessary to examine the history of imperialism, as well as the role that it continues to play, not merely in Africa, but throughout the so-called "third-world." As always, all sources are listed at the end.

Slavery, Poverty, and the Rise of Capitalism

To begin with, we must understand the enormous deleterious impact that the global slave trade had on Africa's development. According to a 2007 [study](#) from Harvard University:

Slavery, according to historical accounts, played an important role in Africa's underdevelopment. It fostered ethnic fractionalization and undermined effective states. The largest numbers of slaves were taken from areas that were the most underdeveloped politically at the end of the 19th century and are the most ethnically fragmented today.

This had a massive impact, and is a primary root cause of Africa's present underdevelopment relative to the rest of the world. The study continues:

[I]f the slave trades had not occurred, then 72% of the average income gap between Africa and the rest of the world would not exist today, and 99% of the income gap between Africa and the rest of the underdeveloped world would not exist. In terms of economic development, Africa would not look any different from the other developing countries in the world.

In addition, a 2020 [study](#) in the journal *Current Anthropology* found that slavery played a crucial role in the rise of global capitalism, contributing enormously to the economic development of the United States in Europe. To quote:

The evidence accumulated by recent research shows beyond reasonable doubt that the employment of enslaved Africans in large-scale commodity production in the Americas phenomenally expanded the Atlantic economy. The major economies of Western Europe and the Americas (especially the United States) benefited considerably from the expansion.

The study goes on to note that "with the use of its naval power, mercantilist Britain dominated the rapidly growing Atlantic markets, which ultimately created the conditions for the Industrial Revolution." Elsewhere, the study explains in more detail:

[The] establishment of the integrated nineteenth-century Atlantic economy was a function of the growth of multilateral trade in the Atlantic basin that resulted from the employment of enslaved Africans in large-scale commodity production in the Americas, on which basis the major economies of the Americas, especially the US economy, and Western European economies, especially the British economy, achieved structural transformation, which included the British Industrial Revolution and its new technologies. [...] By the mid-nineteenth century, an integrated and flourishing capitalist Atlantic economic order had been established."

This led to the expansion of capitalism across the world:

[The] Atlantic economic system became the nucleus of the capitalist global economy. The major economies of the Atlantic world, with Britain at the lead, employed the new technologies of the Industrial Revolution to extend, through sheer economic and military superiority, the Atlantic economic order to Asia and the rest of the world to constitute the hierarchically structured capitalist global economy.

In short, the evidence makes it clear that slavery had a horribly negative impact on Africa's economic and social development, while simultaneously laying the groundwork for the rapid development of the West, as well as the global expansion of industrial capitalism. Without the labor of African slaves, the Industrial Revolution would not have occurred (at least, not where and when it did), and global capitalism could not have been established.

Colonialism and Resource Extraction

Slavery itself is far from the only crime committed by Western imperialists against the African continent; colonialist occupation and resource extraction also had a massively negative impact on Africa's development. According to a 2013 [study](#) from the University of Chicago and Tilburg University:

Most of Africa spent two generations under colonial rule. [...] Relative to any plausible counterfactual, Africa is poorer today than it would have been had colonialism not occurred.

The primary cause of the negative impact was the resource extraction and land seizure perpetrated by white settlers in Africa:

In colonies of white settlement the most important factor was that the highly extractive nature of colonial rule and land grabs manifested themselves, as we noted, in quite serious immiseration of Africans during the colonial period.

This resource extraction, as well as "the large increases in inequality and the racial and ethnic conflicts bequeathed to these colonies after the end of colonialism," serve to explain a large part of Africa's wealth gap relative to the developed countries.

Neocolonialism in Africa and the Third World

In addition, one must take into account the role of neocolonialism, which continues to this day. Institutions like the IMF, by forcing developing nations to implement neoliberal "structural adjustment" policies, have caused a decline in health and social investment throughout the third-world. According to a 2017 [study](#) in the journal *Social Science and Medicine*, "IMF conditionality impedes progress toward the attainment of universal health coverage." This conclusion is echoed in a 2017 [study](#) in the journal *Critical Public Health*, which said:

Controlling for known confounders, an additional year of IMF programme participation decreases health spending, on average, by 1.7 percentage points as a share of GDP. Overall, the regression analysis shows that – contrary to the IMF's claim – their fiscal adjustment policies come at the

expense of social spending. [...] The IMF has long been associated with austerity measures, delivering painful health expenditure cuts that adversely affect already vulnerable populations.

IMF policies have also been found to have a harmful impact on poverty and inequality in developing countries. A 2019 [study](#) in the journal *Social Science Research* found that "policy reforms mandated by the IMF increase income inequality in borrowing countries." Similarly, a 2020 [study](#) in *The Review of International Organizations* found that "IMF programs increase income inequality." It continues:

[Evidence] suggests that the increase in inequality results from significant [absolute] income losses for the poor, while there is no evidence for increasing absolute incomes for any decile. [...] An additional analysis of IMF conditions finds evidence suggesting that inequality rises faster during programs that feature more extensive conditionality and that include social-spending cuts and labor-market conditions.

In short, IMF programs increase inequality, and cause major absolute income losses for the poor. In addition, they have a deleterious impact on workers' rights. A 2015 [study](#) in the *Political Research Quarterly* examined programs from international financial institutions (IFIs), particularly the IMF and the World Bank. They state:

Our findings suggest that programs from both IFIs are negatively and significantly related to labor rights, including laws designed to guarantee basic collective labor rights as well as the protection of these rights in practice.

In short, the IMF and World Bank have harmed health, inequality, poverty, and workers' rights throughout the developing world, including in Africa. This helps to explain the underdevelopment (both economically and socially) of these countries.

Conclusion

All-in-all, it is clear as day that the West has played a devastating role in Africa, as well as the rest of the developing world. It has stunted economic and social progress, extracting land, labor, and resources, while forcing these countries to implement "structural adjustment" programs that worsen their health, increase inequality, and reduce incomes for the poor, all while gutting workers' rights.

In order for the underdeveloped nations to take back control of their own lives, and reach the level of prosperity that they seek, they must break free of capitalism and imperialism, and pursue an independent model of development. Only then, as Eduardo Galeano said, may the children of the oppressed nations claim "their natural right to a place in the sun, in these magnificent lands which could give to all what is now denied to most."

Sources

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