Socialism 101

# The Basics of Socialism

The what, why, when, and where of socialism, communism, and Marxism.

In order to explain the socialist worldview, it’s important that we first establish a philosophic foundation. Socialists believe that all members of society should be equal to each other, and that everyone has certain fundamental and inalienable rights. This includes both material rights—such as the right to food and water—and immaterial rights—such as the right to expression.

Listed below are some of the human rights we believe everyone is entitled to, regardless of their class, race, gender, sexual orientation, or physical and mental ability.

### Freedom of speech

The right to express your views without fear of serious repercussions (such as imprisonment or death penalty) is a fundamental and inalienable right for all people. This right should not, however, be used as an excuse to threaten, harass, or otherwise infringe upon the lawful freedoms and rights of other people. Hate speech is not free speech.

### The right to vote and to be elected

Socialism is a fundamentally democratic ideology. The word democracy comes from the Greek "demos" (people) and "kratia" (power): Literally, "rule by the people". Capitalism, whilst a progressive step away from feudalism, is inherently undemocratic. The economy, which determines all manner of things ranging from the quality and availability of healthcare and education to if we sleep with a roof over our heads or out on the street, is not controlled by the people. Capitalism puts the rich in charge of running the economy, and thus in charge of our lives. Socialism puts the people in charge of the economy, by making the economy democratically controlled. The manner in which this is done varies from tendency to tendency, but the principle is the same: The economy is too important to place in the hands of only a small fraction of the population. "Democracy" under capitalism - simply choosing between two parties, neither of which you particularly agree with, and placing a ballot in a box every 4 years hoping that your vote won't be one of the [~3 million which are ignored](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/hillary-clinton-3-million-popular-vote-donald-trump-us-election-a7487901.html), only to later down the line find out that the politician you voted for sold out to the Philip Morris tobacco corporation which donated $1.6 million USD to their campaign fund - is not democracy. This is why the right to vote and be elected in a free, fair, honest, and open democratic system - without career politicians, nepotism, corruption, or bribery - is fundamental and inalienable.

### The right to food and water

The world collectively produces enough food to feed all of humanity. In fact, the world produces more than enough food. And yet, the number of people undernourished in the world has been on the rise since 2014, reaching an estimated 815 million in 2016 (UN Food and Agriculture Organization, 2017). Rich countries not only have problems with obesity, but are also throwing away metric tons of food waste every day. Private corporations have deemed that food which can not be sold (milk that is a day out of date, tomatoes which are not red or shiny enough, bananas which aren't crooked enough) is to be thrown into dumpsters, and [bleach is to be poured on top so that the hungry and homeless don't eat it](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/foodanddrink/foodanddrinknews/7564402/Iceland-staff-pour-bleach-onto-waste-food-to-stop-homeless-people-eating-it.html). To not only deny food to the hungry when you have plenty, but to go out of your way to ensure that the hungry won't even eat your trash, is a barbaric and inhumane practice. This is why the right to enough food and water to lead a healthy life is a fundamental and inalienable right.

### The right to social security and housing

Social security ensures comfortable living for those who are either temporarily or permanently unable to work due to sickness, disability or age, that new parents can take time off work with pay to take care of their newborn, that no family will be unable to take care of its children for financial reasons, and that all people are able to afford basic necessities like housing, food, clothing, phone, and internet. Social security is a requirement for a society to be humane, and thus it is a fundamental and inalienable right.

### The right to religious practice

Whilst Marxism is a philosophically materialistic world-view, and thus discards religion as unscientific, there is no doubt that religious practice is a fundamental and inalienable right for all people. Houses of worship, be they churches, temples, mosques or otherwise, should be available to all those who desire them.

### The right to education

Education, being the system which is supposed to help turn someone into a productive, responsible, adult member of society, should be of the highest quality, changing and adapting to the latest discoveries in social science, and available without any charge to all who seek it, from preschool to university. In the long term, quality education improves our society in every measurable way. This is why education is a fundamental and inalienable right.

### The right to healthcare

There is no right more fundamental than the right to life itself. All people, irrespective of race or nationality, religion, educational or residential qualifications, social origin, property status, past activities or wealth, have the right to be treated by medical personnel and be given proper medication when they are physically or mentally sick or injured. All medical procedures which are required for a person to live a comfortable life without physical pain or mental anguish should be available free of charge to all who seek it. Healthcare, both mental and physical, is a fundamental and inalienable right.

### The right to employment and payment

With socialism, gone are the days where you sit behind a desk for 8 hours a day with the sole purpose of lining the pockets of your CEO. Jobs should ideally be occupations which contribute in some way to the collective well-being of society at large. Every person has the ability to contribute to society, and society will have the resources to pay all workers decent wages. Under capitalism, [unemployment is beneficial to the rich](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reserve_army_of_labour). Under socialism, unemployment is beneficial to no one. This is why the right to a job and the right to payment for work in accordance with its quantity and quality is a fundamental and inalienable right.

### The right to rest and leisure

Over-working and stress leads to more sick days, lower productivity, lower job satisfaction, increased alienation, as well as more cases of clinical depression and suicide. The right to rest and leisure is fundamental and inalienable, and should be ensured by the reduction of the working day from eight to six hours for the overwhelming majority of the workers, annual vacations with full pay, and wide availability of entertainment such as libraries, restaurants, clubs, resorts, and so forth.

# We are not social democrats

Many European nations practice an ideology known as social democracy. Social democracy is an ideology which supports "economic and social interventions to promote social justice within the framework of a capitalist economy", and thus it a capitalistic ideology, not a socialistic ideology. Socialism, by definition, opposes capitalism and seeks to dismantle the capitalist system. Whilst social democratic nations do well in some regards, they are only able to offer things like social security to their citizens due to the availability of cheap off-shore labour in the third world, and by high taxes on the working class. We socialists oppose outsourcing jobs to third-world nations and we oppose taxes on the general population. We believe in common ownership of enterprise, the productivity of which will be used to benefit all of society and not just CEOs. Taxes and redistributionism only attack the symptoms of inequality, not the cause.

We are not social democrats. We are not Democrats. We are not Bernie Sanders, Hillary Clinton, or Barack Obama.

# We are socialists

Many things are said about us, most of which are untrue. This website is made by socialists, and we use it to tell our side of things. The primary purpose of this website is not to convert people to socialism, but to educate them about what it is socialists believe, and discredit lies that are told about us. If you are interested in learning more, see the links below.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### Socialism? Isn’t that just for angsty teenagers?

Of course not! Some of the greatest and most intelligent people of our era—Albert Einstein, George Orwell, Helen Keller, Leila Kahled, Malala Yousafzai, Martin Luther King, Jr., Nelson Mandela, Oscar Wilde, Frida Kahlo, and Pablo Picasso just to name a few—have realised that capitalism is an unjust and unsustainable system that has to be replaced with socialism.

“I am convinced there is only one way to eliminate these grave evils, namely through the establishment of a socialist economy, accompanied by an educational system which would be oriented toward social goals. In such an economy, the means of production are owned by society itself and are utilized in a planned fashion. A planned economy, which adjusts production to the needs of the community, would distribute the work to be done among all those able to work and would guarantee a livelihood to every man, woman, and child. The education of the individual, in addition to promoting his own innate abilities, would attempt to develop in him a sense of responsibility for his fellow men in place of the glorification of power and success in our present society.”

— Albert Einstein, "Why Socialism?", Monthly Review, May 1949

### Why should I be a socialist?

In short, socialism is us who believe humanity must act in a united and organised manner to face the problems of our generation and beyond. Socialism is for us who are tired of how greed and wealth run our world, and how a few billionaires have more power to influence the world than all the rest of us combined.

We workers are not paid our worth. The value that a worker produces is worth more than the wage he’s given. His boss exploits him and his labour for profit - to make money. In the workplace, the worker lives under the dictatorship of his boss. He does not have freedom of speech (he can be fired for saying the "wrong" thing) and there is no democracy; the CEO and the Board of Directors decide everything - the workers are generally not allowed to make decisions for themselves or for the entire company.

Under socialism, all workers would be allowed to reap what they sow and receive according to the value of the labour they put in, as well as democratically decide how the workplace is run. The workers are the ones who produce value, they are the ones who should receive the benefits. CEOs and other corporate suits don’t contribute to the value produced by the company, and yet they are paid hundreds of times more. For a worker to earn as much as a CEO earns in one year, he would have to work for 45 years ([Source](https://ellison.house.gov/sites/ellison.house.gov/files/Rewarding%20Or%20Hoarding%20Exec%20Summary.pdf)).

Add on top of this tax cuts for the rich, CEO bonuses, tax evasion and offshore bank accounts, and the fact that 8 people own as much as 50% of the entire world's population (Sources: [1](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/business/world-richest-men-eight-oxfam-own-poorest-half-50-per-cent-bill-gates-warren-buffett-amancio-ortega-a7529741.html), [2](http://fortune.com/2017/01/16/world-richest-men-income-equality/), [3](http://www.businessinsider.com/worlds-eight-richest-as-wealthy-as-half-humanity-oxfam-tells-davos-2017-1?r=US&IR=T&IR=T)), and we’ll quickly get a pretty clear picture of just how unfairly our current economic system is structured. But it doesn’t look this way on accident: Capitalism was made to be unfair.

### What is capitalism?

In order to understand why socialism is necessary, we first have to understand what exactly capitalism is. Capitalism is the current dominating mode of production in the world. Capitalism allows for private ownership of the means of production, i.e. private (productive) property such as factories and other workplaces. Capitalism allows for anyone (with sufficient capital) to create a business and produce anything they want, without obligation to do any actual work, and without any kind of duty or obligation toward the rest of society.

[Here is a page with a few phrases which are important to know](https://www.socialism101.com/dictionary).

### What problems do socialists have with capitalism?

Socialists do not believe that capitalism is inherently evil, or that it never should have been invented. On the contrary, if you took a socialist and sent them back to the era of feudalism before the Industrial Revolution, they would no doubt support the establishment of the capitalist mode of production. Capitalism has unquestionably increased global production many times over, and increased the living standards of millions of people who used to work the fields for feudal landlords. But just like technological advancement moves ever onward, so must society continue to move forward, and we socialists believe that capitalism is an outdated system. We do not believe that capitalism is the final mode of production, and we believe that capitalism has to be replaced by a superior system. Capitalism is politically, economically, and ecologically unsustainable.

**But that begs the question: What, specifically, is wrong with capitalism?**

Essentially, capitalism allows for anyone (that has sufficient capital) to create a business and produce anything they want, however they want, with no regard for democracy in the workplace, equal work participation (the owner does not have to work, just own the workplace), or indeed how the rest of society is doing. A capitalist (an owner of means of generating capital and a member of the bourgeois, or "upper", class) does not have to care about whether or not what their business is producing is necessary for society. All a capitalist has to worry about is making a profit. This is why socialists view capitalism as, among other things, ecologically unsustainable; because the Earth has limited resources, and each country has limited space for a limited amount of factories. Under capitalism, these factories are used for anything and everything that can generate profit, not for necessities that society actually needs. This leads to people who live in poverty to be able to afford a smartphone, but not always be able to put food on the table. Capitalist society produces too much of what we don't need, and too little of what we do need, because the capitalist system is based on profit for capitalists, not human needs.

But capitalists don't decide it's time to stop making money once they reach a certain net worth. On the contrary, capitalists are never happy and continually seek to make as much money as possible. The problem with this is that money is merely a social construct with no inherent value. Money in itself is not worth anything, but instead it represents a value that exists somewhere. But this value is not infinite. Capitalists cannot keep making money forever, because eventually they will have taken all the value from the world and would have to start taking money from the poor. And yet this is exactly what has happened: The rich have become richer, and the poor have become poorer. The world's capital, the world's value, has accumulated among the 100-or-so richest individuals in the world, and this accumulation is still occurring. And this accumulation of capital will not simply seize, it will have to be stopped.

One of capitalism's most famous critics, as well as one of socialism's founders, was Karl Marx. Through the years, Marx described various problems with capitalism. Below are just a few examples.

**Workers are paid little, whilst capitalists get rich.**  
Probably the most obvious problem that Marx had with capitalism is that the labourers, who do all the work, are paid very little, whereas the capitalists get rich. The method the capitalists use and have used since the dawn of capitalism is the method of primitive accumulation ("Urspüngliche Akkumulation"). The workers produce something for one price, and the capitalists sell it for a much higher one, whilst simultaneously shrinking the wages of the workers as much as possible, in order to maximise profits. The profit that capitalists make using the method of primitive accumulation is called the surplus value. According to Marx, this "profit" is simply theft, stolen by the capitalists from the hard-working labourers. Marx firmly believed that the workers have a right to the value that they produce, and that those who work with means of production should, alone, own those means of production. In other words, Marx believed that those who work in a workplace should collectively own and democratically decide how that workplace should be run. The only people allowed to be owners of something that can generate capital are those who actually generate that capital.

**Capitalism is alienating - "Entfremdung."**  
Marx understood that work can be the source of our greatest joy, but that capitalism has turned it into something we all detest. Everyone hates Mondays. Monday is the day we lose the freedom of the weekend to start working. But why do people hate Mondays? Why don't people enjoy their work? Essentially, modern work has us do one thing all day, but alienates us from what we believe we could ideally contribute to society. Someone who might want to write symphonies may have to work in a factory, because they need to earn money in order to afford food and housing. And on the other hand, some people who do work with what they feel contributes to society (teachers, for example) are paid very little to do so. Another problem that contributes to alienation is that modern work has become extremely specialised. Capitalists and factory owners don't want master craftsmen to produce the chairs in their furniture factory, they want to be able to hire almost anyone to produce one leg of one chair, and three other people to produce the other three legs, because then it's easy to fire and replace someone if there's a profit to be made, or production can increase with technological advancement. Ten people could be replaced by a computer and one engineer to maintain the computer, leaving 9 people unemployed, all for the sake of profit.

**Capitalism is very unstable.**  
From its very beginning, Capitalism is full of economic crises. Capitalists may dress up these crises as "freakish" and "rare" and "soon to be the last one," but this is far from the truth, argued Marx, because capitalism is unstable by its very nature. Capitalism suffers from a crisis of abundance, rather than, as in the past, a crisis of shortage. Modern production is simply too effective. We produce too much: Much more than we could possibly consume. Modern work is so productive that we could give everyone on Earth a house, a car, enough food and water, as well as free access to a good school and a hospital. But, according to calculations by the World Food Program, there are over 795 million people in the world who do not have enough food to lead a healthy active life. And according to the Global Campaign for Education, over 70 million people don't have access to education. If we were to only produce things we need, rather than, for example, 24 different brands of soap, very few of us would actually have to work, and we could ensure that the common person has what they need to survive. Once people have enough food and a place to live, we can start worrying about producing less essential things.

### What is socialism?

When most people (in the western world, including North America and Europe) hear the word "socialism" they think of Scandinavian and Central European welfare states that have high taxes and different forms of social security nets. It is a common misconception that these countries are socialistic. The correct term to describe these countries is "social democracy", which is a revisionist form of socialism that does not advocate for a transition to the socialistic mode of production. These countries are by all accounts still capitalistic; they advocate for a reform of the current status quo, not a complete transition from capitalism to socialism.

What socialism is, actually, is a political and economic theory of social organisation which advocates that the means of production, distribution, and exchange should be owned and regulated by the community as a whole, rather than by private individuals.

Socialists believe that workers have a right to "reap what they sow", i.e. that they have a right to the value that they produce, and that capitalists who do nothing but own businesses, factories, corporations, etc., do not have any right to steal value from the hard-working labourers. Socialism is inherently an anti-capitalistic ideology, and socialists believe that capitalism is an outdated system that has to be replaced, in order for the working class to achieve true freedom from oppression and exploitation.

"Socialism" can also be used as an umbrella term, describing a collection of ideologies that advocate for the socialist mode of production. This includes but is not limited to:

* Anarchism
* Communism
* Democratic socialism
* Libertarian socialism
* Syndicalism

Most forms of socialism are based on, or are at least inspired by, Marxism.

### What is the difference between social democracy and democratic socialism?

Simply put, democratic socialism advocates for a transition (whether revolutionary or reformistic) from the capitalist mode of production to the socialist mode of production accompanied by a democratic system, whereas social democracy advocates for a "better" version of capitalism achieved through reform of the current status quo that allows for government ownership of (mostly) non-profitable parts of society as well as social security nets and welfare paid for by raised taxes.  
What's wrong with social security nets and welfare?

There is nothing inherently wrong with these things. In fact, socialists want more welfare and social security for the people. Socialists want to ensure that everyone has a place to live, enough food and water to lead a healthy life, as well as free access to good schools and hospitals, among other things (parental leave, work safety laws, paid sick leave, paid vacation, etc.). The problem most socialists have with social democracies (which are famous for providing their citizens with these luxuries) is that they firstly only provide some of these things for their citizens (social democracies don't provide free housing, for example), and that those things are paid for mostly through taxes. High income taxes goes directly against the socialistic idea of letting workers reap what they sow. By taking hard-earned wages from the proletariat (the working- and middle-class), the social democratic state becomes no better than the capitalist class, which uses the method of primitive accumulation to leech profit from their workers. More on this further down on this page.

### What is Marxism?

Marxism is a world view and a method of societal analysis, as well as a collection of political and economic theories that were developed by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Marxism focuses on class relations and societal conflict, and uses a materialistic interpretation of historical development, and a dialectical view of social transformation. Marxist methodology uses economic and socio-political inquiry and applies that to the critique and analysis of the development of capitalism and the role of class struggle in systemic economic change.

Whilst socialism and communism existed before Marx, he and Engels were the ones who turned the utopian dream of a perfect society into a practical science. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels are alone responsible for popularising socialism and communism throughout the world, and it is safe to say that socialism would have remained an impractical, utopian, near impossible-to-implement ideology without Marxist analyses.

### What is communism?

Communism is a social, political, and economic ideology and movement whose ultimate goal is the establishment of a communist society. Communist society is the last stage of socialism (from a materialistic perspective of history, see: Marxism). It is defined as a socio-economic order structured upon the common ownership of the means of production and the absence of social classes, money, and a state. The term "communist society" should be distinguished from the Western concept of the "communist state", the latter referring to a state ruled by a party which professes a variation of Marxism-Leninism.  
What is the difference between socialism and communism?

In Marxist theory, socialism is the transitional state between the overthrow of capitalism and the realisation of communism. Communism is a higher stage of socialism, and socialism is a lower stage of communism.

"Communist" countries such as China, Cuba, Laos, Nepal, and Vietnam have never claimed to have achieved communism, but are communistic in the sense that their goal (or at least their stated goal) is the establishment of a communist society.

### So communists are socialists?

Yes, all communists are by definition also socialists, but not all socialists are communists. Most socialists agree that, theoretically, communism should be the next mode of production after socialism, but different socialistic ideologies have their own ideas for how this society should be reached and what it would look like (and if it can even be reached at all). In addition, many socialistic organisations and political parties no longer want to be associated with the word communism, after the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc essentially changed the meaning of the word communism from "a stateless, moneyless, global society without private ownership of the means of production" into "a state governed by a Marxist-Leninist political party".

### Do socialists advocate for democracy or a dictatorship?

Democracy. During no stage of socialism is a dictatorship necessary. Socialists do, however, advocate for a so-called "dictatorship of the proletariat," which should not be confused with an actual dictatorship. In Marxist theory, all societies which have economic classes also have a dictatorship of one of those classes. In capitalist society, the bourgeois class holds political power over the proletariat, and so capitalist society can be called a dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. On the other hand, socialist society is supposed to be ruled by the working class, so it is called the dictatorship of the proletariat, as in "rule of the working class." The dictatorship of the proletariat only exists in socialist society, however. In communist society, which is classless, there is not a dictatorship of any particular class.

That said, many socialists believe that it is impossible to achieve socialism through bourgeois (liberal, parliamentary) democracy, because those systems were designed by the rich in order to keep the rich in power. But it is not true that socialists don't want democracy. In fact, socialists want more democracy than there already is: Socialists want true democracy where every individual's vote and opinion truly matters. Socialists don't just want more direct democracy (i.e. allowing for the population to directly control how their country is run, rather than just letting them vote for a "representative" that super-promises to vote in their interests, but is under no real obligation to actually do so), but also allow for democratic control of the means of production. That is, allow all workers to democratically decide how their place of work is run, what is produced, how much it should sell for, and so on.

### Was Nazi Germany socialistic?

Although the Nazi Party was called "National Socialist", it was not socialistic. The Nazis promoted a corporatist, class collaborationist ideology which they termed "socialist" in an attempt to gain working class support (socialism was a hugely popular idea in Germany at the time). In practice, Nazi Germany privatised most of the economy, made independent labour unions illegal, and placed communists, socialists, and social democrats in concentration camps along with other "undesirable" citizens such as Jews, people of colour, the differently abled, etc.

### Would no one be allowed to own anything under communism?

If you're afraid the communists are going to break into your home and take your Xbox because private property has been abolished, you can sleep easy knowing that "private property" is not the same as "personal property." Private property refers to means of production (factories, machinery, etc.), whereas personal property refers to the things you the common person own. Your house, your car, and your Xbox are all personal property, and belong to you.

### Would janitors and doctors be paid the same under communism?

No, communists are all for workers getting the credit they deserve. A doctor contributes more to society than a janitor does, so therefore the doctor gets more than the janitor, but they both still need food, water, a home, healthcare, education, maybe a car, etc. The doctor, however, might get some nicer items, more vacation time or days off, fewer hours, and other non-monetary benefits.

There is also the aspect that unimportant positions such as "janitor" might not even exist under socialism or communism, and that the duty of cleaning up would be shared among the people within a certain community (like a workplace or a neighbourhood for example).

And ultimately, communists want to abolish money completely.

In this scene from "Star Trek: First Contact" Captain Picard explains to a woman of the 21st century how the "economics of the future are somewhat different" and that money does not exist. Picard describes how "the acquisition of wealth is no longer the driving force in our lives" that instead "we work to better ourselves, and the rest of humanity."

However, the abolishment of money would not come at the same time as the abolishment of capitalism. Money would still be used in socialist society, probably for hundreds of years. A quite important part of socialism is that the workers would no longer be exploited by their employers, and could freely enjoy the fruits of their labour. For some time, this would probably manifest itself as money that could be spent to buy consumer goods: Video games, cars, cigars, good food, etc. Whatever it is the common people would want. If socialism becomes the dominant mode of production in the world, and automation and productivity continues to increase at its current rate, the need for money, as well as states, will wither away. At this point, socialist society would start transitioning into communist society.

Two great videos that I recommend are [“Humans Need Not Apply” by CGPGrey](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Pq-S557XQU) and [“The Rise of the Machines – Why Automation is Different this Time” by Kurzgesagt](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WSKi8HfcxEk). They go into detail about just how much of a catastrophe automation is for our current capitalist society. However, under socialism/communism, automation is nothing but beneficial. It will simply allow more people to spend time doing what it actually is they want to do, instead of working in a factory.

### Haven't all attempts at socialism failed? What about Stalin, and gulags, and so on?

No, plenty of them succeeded. In most places where you've heard of there being a socialist revolution, material conditions have massively improved. Had there not been revolutions in those places, you most likely would not have heard much about them, and they'd just be like all the impoverished capitalist countries in Africa, South America, and Asia.

When it comes to questions like "Was Stalin responsible for millions of deaths?", socialists very rarely agree with each other. There are generally three ways for socialists to view Stalin and his era of rule:

1. Stalin was a brutal dictator who betrayed Lenin and socialism as a whole.
2. Stalin did the best he could in a bad situation (World War 2).
3. Stalin was not a dictator and made good contributions to socialism and the world as a whole.

But rather than trying to argue for one side or another, I'm going to recommend a couple of books that argue for different viewpoints on the matter that you can read. The links will be at the bottom of this page.

### Is social democracy, or "Nordic-style socialism" a viable alternative to capitalism?

Social democracy is a system that, by definition, advocates for social justice within the framework of a capitalistic economy. It serves not as an alternative to capitalism itself, but rather a different, "friendlier" version of it. To many, the social democratic system seems like a good middle-ground between capitalism and socialism. But social democracy is a system built not only on the exploitation of the workers in the country it is established, but also on imperialistic exploitation of the global south's "third world" countries. Social democracy is not viable without the luxury that cheap offshore labour provides. If conditions for the workers in third world countries improve (e.g. child labour is outlawed and the 12-hour workday is changed to an 8- or 6-hour workday), the standards of living in social democratic countries fall.

Further critiques of social democracy include the fact that democratic systems of social democratic countries still serve the bourgeoisie. The rich and the corporations work tirelessly to undo any victories won by the workers through democratic means (universal healthcare, free education, unemployment subsidies, raising of the minimum wage, etc.), resulting in effectively half the parliament in any given social democratic country being bourgeois, and the other being social democratic, both sides of which carry on a back-and-fourth political battle that never ends and doesn't have a winner. The short 4-year terms only add to the problem: A party with majority parliamentary representation in a social democratic country tries desperately to make as much short-term change as possible, and do nothing when they don't have majority, resulting in no party ever making any long-term commitments and practically abandoning ideology altogether. It turns politics into a sports game where people vote for their favourite team, not for any ideological reason but because they believe their team is the best, or has the prettiest logo, or the best slogan, or the most handsome party leader, or simply because their parents vote for that party. ([Source](http://news.gallup.com/poll/14515/teens-stay-true-parents-political-perspectives.aspx))

### Socialism/Communism can't work because of human nature.

A quick glance at history and anthropology will ruin the idea that "human nature" is a static unchanging thing. Human nature and behaviour is partly plastic (reflections of historical and cultural conditions in relation to the specific mode of production), which is evidenced by the vast disparities in human behaviour and social organisation throughout various historical periods and geographical locations. Civil society, human behaviour and ideology have changed over time in the same way that species alter genetically over time.

““To look at people in capitalist society and conclude that human nature is egoism, is like looking at people in a factory where pollution is destroying their lungs and saying that it is human nature to cough.””

— Andrew Collier, Marx: A Beginner’s Guide

Human nature arguments boil down to the fact that the ruling ideology of society is shaped by the base economic relations. In other words, we perceive it as "natural" to work for monetary incentives because that's pretty much the only choice we have right now. It seems "natural" that there should be hierarchy because we have them at our jobs, in our democracy, in the home thanks to patriarchal family relations, etc. Humans seem greedy "by nature" because without money, we starve or can't pay for shelter, so it is in our interest to try to accumulate money under the current economical setup. Capitalism literally compels capitalists to behave in a way that can be perceived as greedy, because if they don't, their competitor will and then they will be gobbled up or put out of business. It's the system that makes these things seem natural or essential.

But Engels and Marx and others disproved these things about human nature by looking at history. Among many native nations in the Americas, there was no money. How, then, did anything get done if money is the only incentive to work? There is also a ton of evidence that humans, for millions of years, operated more or less communally, with little or no hierarchy. If it was innate "human nature," how could this be so? How could greedy humans cooperate and survive during these millions of years of scarcity if they were all so greedy and purely self-interested by nature?

To attribute contemporary human behaviour to "human nature" without looking at history and without considering the effects of the environment and social relations that necessarily shape human behaviour is simplistic and unscientific, and it is usually an excuse made by the politically faint of heart or those who benefit from the current economic system.

I would point out that there is a massive propaganda effort to control this narrative and force it into our minds. But the real heart of the matter, that Marx would tell you, is that it is because the system (capitalism) forces those conditions upon you. In order to succeed in capitalism, it often pays off to behave greedily, and many situations arise where to not behave greedily is to fall behind and risk losing. And to lose in capitalism is to be made a debt slave, if not then to be homeless, broken, hungry, and in a word, oppressed. And here's where Marx’s ideas get really powerful. If you want to change this behaviour - to act greedily - then you need only change the system that the person is in. If you have a system (socialism), where you will always have a home, always have food, always have medical care, always have water - then there is no need to behave greedily in order to survive and have a life of dignity and purpose. Marx would argue that greed will pass from the human condition. Poverty and war too. This was Karl Marx's dangerous idea - you wouldn't just change the world, but all of humankind.

### No one would want to work under communism.

The incentive to work is the same as it always is: that which is enabled by the mode of production. Selfishness is not the main motivation for work in many epochs. It's silly to think that without capitalism and capitalists we'd all just sit on our hands and starve to death. The vast majority of human history was without these things, in a form of primitive communism.

Think of it like this: You and two friends live on a farm. You all need a barn, so you get together and build a barn. Someone chops the wood, someone makes the plans, someone drags the wood to where the barn is supposed to be built, and then you all build the barn together. Because all three of you need the barn, and all three of you are going to use the barn, there is no need for money to be exchanged during this process. The means of producing the barn are owned by all three of you in a communal fashion. Congratulations: You just participated in communism. That wasn't so scary, was it?

There is no "Barn Building CEO" that dictates over the other two, pays them a wage, and then becomes the sole owner of the barn, charging the other two every time they want to use the barn. Because that's inefficient. Capitalism is inefficient. Capitalism doesn't work, because of "human nature".

### Socialism/Communism is idealistic.

That really couldn't be further from the truth. Socialism is based on historical and dialectical materialism, rather than Hegelian dialectics. This means it is founded on an evidence based materialist understanding of society, and the conflicts that arise from different class interests - manifesting as physical conflict as opposed to ideological battles. Marxism is the social equivalent of the scientific method, it is analytical and advances and changes its analysis based on the changes in society.

Further reading: [Socialism: Utopian and Scientific](https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1880/soc-utop/) by Friedrich Engels.

### What would life be like under communism, then?

What's important to understand is that communism is not a detailed plan which has been laid out and after which we must outline our society. Communism is not an ideal, in that it's a concept someone thought of one day and which we strive to achieve, it is the result of the material dialectics of class society.

As Marxists we understand that the inherent contradictions of capitalist society, like that the business owner will always have a fundamental material interest in increasing their profits and that the worker has a contradictory interest in increasing their wage (more profit for the business owner and higher wages for workers are contradictory material interests), will inevitably lead, and has already led, to class struggle. This struggle cannot be resolved without fundamentally changing the material relations of the two contending classes - the owners and the workers - to the means of production. In other words, it ends either in the common ruin of the contending classes, or in a reconstitution of society itself.

Socialism is the only system following modern industrial capitalism which is absent of internal class struggle. Over time, as socialism establishes itself as the dominant mode of production in the world, and the concept of the capitalist class is dissolved following the abolition of private property, society will shed the legacies of capitalism. The concept of money or currency, for example, is tied to class oppression - it exists not inclusively, to "allow hard workers to reap the rewards of their toil", but to exclude; to keep those at the bottom of society where they are, and prohibit them from comfort.

Communism is the principle of "from each according to their ability, to each according to their needs", meaning everyone contributes in the way and to the capability that they are able, and receives everything they need from the labours of others. In capitalism, there is alienation—you don't know the name of the farmer whose chickens laid your eggs, and although you are both workers you are separated into "producer" and "consumer", even though you yourself in a different context will also be a producer, and the farmer will be a consumer. In communism, we work out of a sense of obligation to give back to the community that keeps us alive. It is the same feeling one might have toward their close family - children work to take care of their parents in their old age out of a sense of obligation to give back to the people who clothed and nurtured them. Communism takes this concept and extends it to include not just close family but also friends, neighbours, colleagues, etc.

The minute details of life under a hypothetical communist society are, in my own opinion, uninteresting; because communism will be the organic evolution of socialism, and it does not follow some grand architect's design. There are many detailed theories on the organisation of socialist society, ranging from anarchist communism to Bolshevism, but whichever version of socialism ends up victorious over capitalism, it will be the stepping stone toward communism. Communism will not be enacted by decree of government or laid out in a constitution or law, but will emerge on its own by the very nature of socialist society. Friedrich Engels said, in Anti-Dühring, "The interference of the state power in social relations becomes superfluous in one sphere after another, and then ceases of itself. The government of persons is replaced by the administration of things and the direction of the processes of production. The state is not "abolished", it withers away."

### Socialism/Communism looks good on paper, but it doesn't work in practice.

Yes, it does work. Just like Capitalism and Feudalism work. The question is not “does it work?”, the question is “which one works best for the common man?” and since socialism is the ideology meant for the common man, rather than the rich, and history has shown us that only socialism is capable of turning an undeveloped feudal country into a modernised industrial powerhouse in just a few years, it is of no doubt that socialism not only works, but works better than the alternatives.

This question reminds me of the joke "Communism looks good on paper, but in practice it's usually sabotaged by a military coup d'etat financed by the CIA." Which has some truth to it.

Every time socialism has been attempted, the US has intervened either directly through war against socialist countries:

* Korean War 1950-53
* Lebanon Crisis 1958
* Bay of Pigs Invasion in Cuba 1961
* Simba Rebellion 1964
* Vietnam War 1965-75
* Communist Insurgency in Thailand 1965-83
* Multinational Force in Lebanon 1982-1984
* Invasion of Grenada 1983

Or through having the CIA perform a government change:

* The 1953 Iranian coup d'etat where the US overthrew a democratically elected socialist (Mohammad Mosaddegh) in favour of an authoritarian dictator (Mohammad Reza Pahlavi).
* The 1954 Guatemalan coup d'etat where the US overthrew a democratically elected social democrat (Jacobo Árbenz) in favour of an authoritarian dictator (Carlos Castillo Armas).
* The 1973 Chilean coup d'etat where the US overthrew a democratically elected socialist (Salvador Allende) in favour of a totalitarian fascist dictator (Augusto Pinochet who went on to kill over 3000 people, torture 30,000 people, and put 80,000 people in concentration camps).
* The 1991 Haitian coup d'etat where the US overthrew a democratically elected social democrat (Jean-Bertrand Aristide), who is widely believed to have been the winner of the first honest election in Haiti, in favour of an authoritarian dictator (Raoul Cédras).

And keep in mind that the above is only a list of successful regime changes by the CIA against socialist nations. It does not include unsuccessful attempts at regime changes by the CIA, nor any attempts (successful or not) at regime changes by the CIA against non-socialist nations. The CIA has been involved in at least 21 covert actions of regime change.

Or indirectly through supporting enemies of socialists:

* Russian Civil War 1918-20
* Chinese Civil War 1944-49
* Greek Civil War 1944-49
* First Indochina War 1946-54
* Paraguayan Civil War 1947
* Malayan Emergency 1948-60
* Mau Mau Uprising 1952-60
* Cuban Revolution 1953-59
* Second Indochina War 1953-75
* First Taiwan Strait Crisis 1954-55
* Algerian War 1954-62
* Second Taiwan Strait Crisis 1958
* Central American Crisis 1960-96
* Congo Crisis 1960-65
* Eritrean War of Independence 1961-91
* Dhofar Rebellion 1962-76
* Sarawak Communist Insurgency 1962-90
* Insurgency in Northeast India 1963-Present
* Dominican Civil War 1965
* Chadian Civil War 1965-79
* Bolivian Campaign 1966-67
* Second Korean War 1966-69
* South African Border War 1966-90
* Years of Lead 1968-82 (where the US supported Nazis fighting against Marxist-Leninist anti-fascists)
* Communist insurgency in Malaysia 1968-89
* Al-Wadiah War 1969
* Civil conflict in the Philippines 1969-Present
* Yemenite War of 1972
* Angolan Civil War 1974-2002
* Ethiopian Civil War 1974-91
* Lebanese Civil War 1975-90
* Western Sahara War 1975-91
* Indonesian occupation of East Timor 1975-91
* Insurgency in Laos 1975-Present
* Civil conflict in Turkey 1976-Present
* Ogaden War 1977-78
* Cambodian-Vietnamese War 1977-91 (where the US supported the mass-murdering pretend-socialist Pol Pot)
* Mozambican Civil War 1977-92
* NDF Rebellion 1978-82
* Chadian–Libyan conflict 1978-87
* Yemenite War of 1979
* Afghan-Soviet War 1979-89 (where the US supported "freedom fighting" islamist groups who later went on to form Al-Qaeda and ISIS)
* Internal conflict in Peru 1980-Present
* Afghan Civil War 1989-92

### Alright, I’m convinced. Capitalism has to go. How do we do that?

The answer to this will vary greatly depending on the conditions of whichever country you live in. Everywhere is different, and not just the road to socialism but the socialist system itself will vary depending on the conditions of where it is implemented. Socialism in Cuba will inevitably work differently from socialism in, for instance, China.

Some general advice I can give, which does apply to everyone the world over, is to find like-minded people and coordinate with them. You'd be surprised how much a small group of dedicated socialists can achieve in, for example, city councils. If there is a socialist party or organisation in your area, I encourage you to seek them out. They may not adhere to your specific tendency of socialism, and you may have ideological disagreements with them, but working together is always better than working alone.

In America, for example, very few people bother to show up to city council meetings. A seemingly small group of people can make a large impact by simply showing up and making the case for pro-worker policies (city-wide public transport, for instance).

Simple welfare policies that may seem like "incrementalism" and a waste of time, can afford working people more bargaining power. It's in the interest of the bourgeoisie to keep a portion of the working class unemployed (the "reserve army of labour", as Marx called it) and desperate for money to buy food and pay rent. Desperate workers are willing to take jobs with bad working conditions and poor wages, so long as the money is just enough to keep them alive. But the less desperate the workers are, through unemployment benefits for instance (or public transport, public healthcare, public college; anything that saves workers time and money), the less likely they are to accept poor working conditions, and the more likely they are to consider unionisation and political activism.

Socialism won't be established overnight, but the way to get there is to use every means possible to strengthen the socioeconomic position of the proletariat. In the timeless words of Karl Marx:

“The Communists disdain to conceal their views and aims. They openly declare that their ends can be attained only by the forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions. Let the ruling classes tremble at a Communistic revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win.  
Working Men of All Countries, Unite!”

— Karl Marx, The Manifesto of the Communist Party, 1848