



Written by [Dennis Behreandt](#) on September 2, 2019

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The Deadly History of Socialism

Many Americans, especially young people, want to get rid of capitalism – because of its inequality – and install socialism as a replacement. But such a plan has been tried all over the world, with disastrous results.



Today, if you are a young adult, finishing high school or making your way through college, or maybe even just entering the workforce, you have been made keenly aware of inequality by your teachers, your guidance counselors, and by nearly everything you see and hear in the media.

You have been told, repeatedly, and may even believe, some of the following: The one-percent exploit everyone else; white people have an unfair advantage over everyone else; workers are exploited by business owners; the justice system only works for the rich; conservatives and/or Republicans are Nazis; freedom of speech is a cover for intolerance and hate; it's unfair that some people have more wealth than others, and they got that wealth by cheating, lying, and deceiving others, or by using their unearned "white privilege."

If you believe these things, and others like them, then you likely believe that there is only one valid solution to the problem. And that is, we must get rid of capitalism, overthrow any whiff of privilege, and institute a *fair* system of socialism that takes care of the underprivileged and takes away any *unfair* advantages that others seem to enjoy.

If this were attempted, would it work? Would such a system actually result in a better society, one that offered greater but more-evenly distributed prosperity?

Well, there is no need to guess or speculate. In fact, over the last 10 to 12 decades there have been many nations that have tried to implement just the type of socialist system that is now so widely recommended for America. How did those efforts turn out?

The short answer is: not very well. Let's examine some of the outcomes.

Germany

In the 1930s and 1940s, until the destruction of the Hitler regime in 1945, Germany was a socialist nation. No doubt, you've heard that this isn't true, that Germany was a *fascist* nation or a *Nazi* nation. Moreover, you've been told, repeatedly, that *Nazism* is an ideology of the politics of the Right. More



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bluntly, you have been told, or at least you've heard repeatedly, that conservatives and Republicans are today's modern, racist Nazis.

Let's clear up this foggy notion straight away. "Nazi" is an acronym for the full name of the party in question: the *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* or NSDAP. In English that is the *National Socialist German Workers Party*. Let's put a fine point on this: In Nazi-era Germany, the plan was to build a socialist nation favoring ethnic Germans by ending the supposed privileges others, such as the Jewish minority, were imagined to have.

This tells you something very specific about socialism in general that we will see played out again and again everywhere socialism is implemented. While the prevailing belief today is that socialism is about fairness for everyone, the reality is that socialism is really about favoring some group or groups over all others. In Nazi Germany, the group to be favored was the ethnic Germans.

Now, socialism, when instituted, has both economic and social consequences. These may appear unevenly, depending on the means and areas of emphasis of socialist strategies of implementation. In Nazi Germany, the most immediate and obvious impacts were in the area of social consequences.

It's all well and good to speak in theoretical terms, but let's make this personal. Suppose you are a young high-school aged person in 1938 Germany. You are and have been close friends with the boy or girl next door, who, like you, is ethnically German. Unfortunately, your neighbor, while just as German as you, is also Jewish. And his father, who for years worked hard to build up the success of a clothing factory, was no different than your father who worked hard leading a local chemical factory. While your father, proud of his red Nazi arm band, prospered and his factory grew large selling the ingredients of war and death to the regime, your neighbor's father was forced to sell his clothing factory to an "Aryan" for pennies on the dollar. Then, one day not long after, you noticed that local family had disappeared, carted off to a concentration camp.

Lest you think this is fiction, be assured that it is not. It is, in fact, the story, in broad outline, of a young man named Gert Silberbart. Interviewed after the war about his experience when he was only 18 years old, he recalled how his family was arrested in Berlin early in March 1943. Soon thereafter, the family was loaded into cattle cars for the three-day journey to the Auschwitz death camp. After that, Gert never saw his family again. He survived unimaginable conditions including slave labor, death marches, beatings, starvation, and much more, until the American armies reached nearby. At that point, a concentration camp commander promised that all prisoners would be peacefully and quietly handed over. Gert didn't believe this, and rightfully so, as tens of thousands who were unable to hide were killed.

Gert described the ordeal at length: "I had hidden in several blocks, in basements, partly in the sewers ... in holes in the sewage system, in attics, in short, in every hideout where I could disappear," he recounted of his survival tactics. "Thus I was hiding for about a week. Constantly there was the call for the Jews to come out ['Juden raus,' literally 'Jews out'] and when the largest part of the Jews were gone, they went after the Christians. There were daily transports from the camp, so that in the camp that had held 100,000 people a week before, at the point of liberation by the Americans on April 11, there were only 22,000 people left."

Because the Nazis wanted to have "fairness" for "Aryans," they persecuted and murdered most everyone else. Does this strike anyone as fair? Of course not. Yet to many Germans of the era, and



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especially to the fervent followers of the NSDAP, their victims received what they had coming to them for being hitherto thought to be unfairly advantaged compared to the average German worker. It doesn't matter that there wasn't any actual advantage enjoyed by the Silberbart family or by those other millions of men, women, and children whose lives were destroyed by the Nazis. Facts, in socialist systems, don't matter. Only feelings matter. Only outrage matters. Only propaganda matters. To socialists, the individual lives of those outside of the favored group don't matter.

What was the result of this, in Nazi Germany? Millions were enslaved. Millions were murdered in cold blood.

There is much that can be said about the specifics of Nazi Germany. But the salient point, the most important point, and one that you will see repeated with so many socialist efforts, is that millions of people who did not deserve to be killed were murdered by the socialist government.

Keep in mind, also, that the blood-drenched Nazi government came to power *legally*. Moreover, Germany before the Nazis was hardly a backwater. It was the most advanced nation in Europe, with the world's best scientists in physics and chemistry, a robust and prosperous industrial economy, and a centuries' long history as a leader in the arts, in literature and in philosophy.

After the war, Germany was divided between the armies of the Allies and the Soviet Union. Thus split in two, Germany now became two nations, a free Germany in the west, and, in the east, a communist gulag state.

Both versions of Germany started from the same point economically and socially. Devastated by war, their housing stock, factories, distribution networks, communications channels, and, above all, their people, were in shambles. In one part of the country, growth and development would take place under the free, Western model. In the east, growth and development would take place under the communist-socialist model. This gives us a perfect opportunity to understand if the socialist theory is correct: that under the socialist system people are happier, healthier, and wealthier than under the Western system of freedom.

From the Cold War Western point of view, it's long been obvious which version of Germany was more successful. In the West, the damage from the war was quickly repaired. The West German economy rapidly became the most successful in Europe, and goods and services were readily available. In East Germany, by contrast, damage from the war lingered for decades. Cars were rare and uniformly horrible. Travel was heavily restricted and the population was kept in check by the Stasi, the much-feared secret police.

As with the Nazi regime, we again have eyewitness accounts of conditions in East Germany. Among the best of these are the letters from East Germans that American German-language teacher David F. Strack received over several decades from ordinary East Germans that detailed aspects of their lives.

Strack, himself, had had occasion to visit East Germany, starting in the mid-1960s. Recounting his first visit to East Berlin in the opening pages of his book *Letters Over the Wall: Life in Communist East Germany*, he told of seeing extreme battle damage to buildings that still hadn't been repaired even two decades after the end of World War II. Astonishingly, there were even piles of human remains near one bombed out church. "An experience I'll never forget," he recounted. "After taking a picture (35mm slide!) of the still to be rebuilt roof structure of a large building — the German Cathedral on Gendarmen Square — I looked down from the pile of rubble where I was standing. To my shock, lying on the rocks,



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bricks and debris, were human bones!"

"And yes, I did take pictures of them." The grisly photos are reproduced in his book.

The East Germans whom Strack met during his visits, and who corresponded with him afterwards over the decades, were quite well aware of the disparity between their lot behind the figurative Iron Curtain — and the all-too-real Berlin Wall — and their German counterparts in West Germany and West Berlin.

In one letter from East Germany, "Gerard" (Strack changed the names of his correspondents to protect their privacy) described his living conditions:

We live here in a strange country and in an even stranger city. Especially here in the city, the division between East and West is just crazy. Railroad, streetcar lines and streets end suddenly at the border, many houses are even divided. When I stand at the border and look at the people and buildings on the other side — it's a very strange feeling. And they are Germans — even my relatives — and I'm not allowed to visit them. If I were to illegally go over the border I would be shot or would spend two years in prison. I'm not allowed at all to travel to a capitalistic country; therefore I can never visit you. In West Germany the people live better, and if the border were open, many people would leave this country and want to live there. In the GDR [German Democratic Republic], workers are needed, and if all of them left, who would then do the work?

Indeed, so many East Germans "voted with their feet" and sought asylum in the West that the government of East Germany built a wall, the Berlin Wall, to keep people from leaving. According to CNN, from 1949 to 1961, more than 2.7 million people escaped East Germany, fleeing to the West. Once the East German government cracked down on travel and built the wall, such escape became nearly impossible to accomplish. Border guards, in fact, were authorized to shoot to kill.

This raises the question: If the socialists of East Germany had built a utopian paradise, why were so many so eager to risk their lives to escape it?

Mao's China

The reason why everyone frantically attempts to escape socialism once it's shackled upon them is because it does, in fact, bring equality to the people — by making them equally unfree, equally poor, equally miserable, and very often, equally dead.

The formula for the ideal socialist "paradise," a formula that has since been tried in one form or another in every socialist state, was proposed during the era of the French Revolution by François-Noël "Gracchus" Babeuf.

A socialist revolutionary, Babeuf was eventually arrested, tried, and executed for his attempts to foment revolution. During his defense, he elaborated on his social program.

"The products of industry and of genius also become the property of all, the domain of the entire association, from the very moment that the workers and the inventors have created them," he argued.

Elaborating further, he continued:

To be more specific, it is necessary *to bind together everyone's lot*; to render the lot of each member of the association independent of chance, and of happy or unfavorable circumstance; *to assure to every man and to his posterity, no matter how numerous it may be, as much as they need, but no more than*



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they need; and to shut off from everybody all the possible paths by which they might obtain some part of the products of nature and of work that is more than their individual due.

The sole means of arriving at this is to establish a *common administration*; to suppress private property; to place every man of talent in the line of work he knows best; to oblige him to deposit the fruit of his work in the common store, to establish a simple *administration of needs*, which, keeping a record of all individuals and all the things that are available to them, will distribute these available goods with the most scrupulous equality, and will see to it that they make their way into the home of every citizen.

Babeuf lost his head to the guillotine before he could see his plan put into action. But has it ever been tried? And, how does it work in practice?

In fact, it has been tried, and the results have been miserable, bloody failure and genocide.

Mainland China fell to communist domination in the years following World War II. Under the dictatorial control of the Communist Party, led by “Chairman” Mao Tse-tung, the regime set about implementing Babeuf’s plan to the letter.

Final implementation came in the form of the not-so-aptly named “Great Leap Forward.” Through enslavement of the people as described by Babeuf, Mao intended to force China’s economy to match and then exceed the production capacity of England within just a few years.

By now, you can likely guess what happened. Frank Dikötter, a Hong Kong-based historian who has had access to a wide range of Chinese communist archives and has done groundbreaking work in removing the veil from decades of Chinese communist tyranny, put it succinctly in his 2010 book, *Mao’s Great Famine*. “Between 1958 and 1962,” he wrote, “China descended into hell.”

Summarizing his findings in the book, Dikötter wrote:

The peasant masses were mobilised to transform both agriculture and industry at the same time, converting a backward economy into a modern communist society of plenty for all. In the pursuit of a utopian paradise, everything was collectivised, as villagers were herded together in giant communes which heralded the advent of communism. People in the countryside were robbed of their work, their homes, their land, their belongings and their livelihood. Food, distributed by the spoonful in collective canteens according to merit, became a weapon to force people to follow the party’s every dictate. Irrigation campaigns forced up to half the villagers to work for weeks on end on giant water-conservancy projects, often far from home, without adequate food and rest. The experiment ended in the greatest catastrophe the country had ever known, destroying tens of millions of lives.

Supposedly for the good of all, the central planners determined what work needed to be done, who should do it, and how much should be produced. That, in turn, determined how long people should work, and where they should work. In addition to sending tens of thousands away from home to work on water control projects (such as dam building), others were forced to work the fields on massive collective agriculture projects, and most were required also to set up backyard iron smelting operations.

Now, anywhere in the West, if dams are to be built or other massive construction projects are undertaken, heavy equipment is used. Not so in Mao’s communist China, where laborers were forced to use hand tools (if they were lucky) or their bare hands. In the West, for iron production, iron ore is smelted — heated in a furnace until the iron separates from the impurities. Raw materials were scarce



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in communist China, so to maintain and reach production quotas, the “smelters” just melted down any metallic item that could be found, including axes, shovels, hammers, nails, pots and pans, and everything else. As a consequence, soon there were no tools to use for any job, including cooking.

Finally, in agriculture, again without tools, pressure was deployed to use techniques that did not actually work, and production plummeted. Meanwhile, with fertilizers nearly impossible to find, houses were torn down and their materials used to build communal canteens and even to fertilize the ground instead. Error compounded mistake and engendered increasing brutality.

While the socialist program in China was supposed to be for the benefit of all the people, if you believed the propaganda, the reality was that state power was being used to oppress and destroy people. In fact, outright economic and physical war against the people was openly demanded by communist officials.

Discussing agricultural production and the impact on the majority of poor Chinese citizens, historian Dikötter noted that the communists wildly overestimated actual production and then punished the people for failing to achieve in reality the fantasies of the planners.

“The actual grain output for 1958 was just over 200 million tonnes, but on the basis of all the claims made about bumper crops the leadership estimated that it was close to 410 million tonnes,” Dikötter wrote. “Punitive extractions based on entirely fictitious figures could only create fear and anger in the villages. The stage was set for a war on the people in which requisitions would plunge the country into the worst famine recorded in human history. [High-ranking party official] Tan Zhenlin was blunt, addressing some of the leaders of South China in October 1958: ‘You need to fight against the peasants.... There is something ideologically wrong with you if you are afraid of coercion.’”

Chairman Mao was even more blunt in response to the vast amount of death and suffering he was inflicting on the country. “When there is not enough to eat, people starve to death,” he said in a speech in 1959. “It is better to let half of the people die so that the other half can eat their fill.” Of course, there would have been plenty to eat if it hadn’t been for Mao and his attempts to realize Babeuf’s twisted vision of Utopia.

Instead, villagers starved to death. Some were forced to eat their own children. Relating what he had been told by survivors of the “Great Leap Forward,” Wei Jing-sheng wrote: “Mao Zedong and his henchmen, with their criminal political system, had driven parents mad with hunger and led them to hand their own children over to others, and to receive the flesh of others to appease their own hunger.”

There was even a black market for human meat. “Human flesh, like everything else, was traded on the black market,” wrote Dikötter. “A farmer who bartered a pair of shoes for a kilo of meat at the Zhangye railway station found that the package contained a human nose and several ears.... To escape detection, human flesh was sometimes mixed with dog meat when sold on the black market.”

Lest it be thought that these are just ugly and sensational anecdotes, Dikötter quoted from official reports.

It’s hard to conceive of the scale of Mao’s destruction. According to Dikötter, his research “shows that at least 45 million people died unnecessarily between 1958 and 1962.” To put this into perspective, there are approximately 42.5 million people living in the three largest metropolitan areas of the United States combined (New York City, Los Angeles, and Chicago). Thus, in just four years, the Chinese Communists wiped out the equivalent population of our three largest cities.



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But even this horrible statistic doesn't fully capture the scale of Chinese communist bloodlust. The authors of *The Black Book of Communism*, the pre-eminent scholarly catalogue of communist mass murder and atrocity, estimate that 65 million died or were killed as a result of communist policy and atrocity in China.

Famine and Genocide in the Soviet Union

Marxists, communists, socialists — whatever you choose to call them — these followers of Babeuf's vision tried repeatedly to nationalize and collectivize the societies that they enslaved, always with the same result.

In the former Soviet Union, after the Bolshevik Revolution, Lenin first, then Stalin sought to collectivize agriculture and nationalize industry on the Babeuf plan. Not surprisingly, this ran into opposition from those who didn't want to see the hard-won fruits of their labor stolen from them by the new state authorities. Thus, as is often the case in hard-core socialist states, ideological "enemies" had to be hunted down and destroyed.

The team of French historians who catalogued the many and varied egregious crimes of communism in their invaluable *Black Book of Communism* noted that Lenin and his henchmen in the USSR wasted no time in hunting down their "class enemies."

"Lenin and his comrades initially found themselves embroiled in a merciless 'class war,' in which political and ideological adversaries, as well as the more recalcitrant members of the general public, were branded as enemies and marked for destruction," they wrote. Lenin and his fellow communists "had decided to eliminate, by legal and physical means, any challenge or resistance, even if passive, to their absolute power."

One group that came in for especially harsh treatment were the Cossacks, an ethnic group with a long tradition of independence and a fierce reputation as skilled warriors. Many Cossacks had been anti-Bolshevik.

The communists, as a result, began an explicit policy of "de-Cossackization" in about 1920, which resulted in widespread genocide. The "Cossacks ... were exterminated, the men shot, the women, children and the elderly deported, and the villages razed or handed over to new, non-Cossack occupants," wrote the authors of *The Black Book of Communism*.

A few years later came the campaign of "dekulakization," which applied the earlier strategy of de-Cossackization on a larger scale. The Kulaks were a class of independent farmers in Russia and Ukraine who had gained a bit of wealth through their hard work. Naturally, this was intolerable to the communists now ruling from Moscow, and so the order came down "to exterminate the kulaks as a class."

This deadly campaign was conducted simultaneously with state restriction on the food supply, resulting in one of history's most deadly famines, one that would foreshadow the famine of Mao's Great Leap Forward, the mass deaths under Cambodia's brutal Pol Pot, and the starvation of millions in socialist Ethiopia in the 1980s.

In the first decades of the Soviet Union's bloody history, millions lost their lives in the communist pursuit of Babeuf's Utopia. But even in the 1970s, when Soviet bloodlust had begun to ebb, the socialist



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system was still incapable of providing anything but a miserable, poor life for the average citizen.

In his book on life in Soviet Russia, *Washington Post* reporter Robert G. Kaiser pointed out the challenges that the average resident of Moscow faced in the 1970s in acquiring the basics of life that people in the free world, even those of the poorest conditions, took for granted.

“‘If you wanted to have potatoes every day,’ a young man responsible for the family shopping explained, ‘you would have a hard time getting them,’” he told Kaiser. “‘Some parts of Moscow just don’t have potatoes on some days, you might have to go way across town. And you wouldn’t know which direction to set off in, because there’s no telling where potatoes might be. So you don’t have potatoes every day, you buy them when you can.’”

Meanwhile, in the free nations of the West, anyone could (and still can) enter any grocery store at any time, even in the middle of the night at 24-hour retailers, and buy potatoes for what amounts to pocket change. Moreover, tens of thousands of other items are simultaneously on sale, a vast cornucopia readily available. None of this was possible in the Soviet Union, a “super power” that couldn’t readily provide even basic staples on a continuing basis to its unfortunate citizens.

This was the reality of socialism. It’s no better today in those socialist nations that remain. Such a statement seems counterintuitive — after all, there does not seem to be mass murder and assorted other mass atrocities, as were so prevalent in the past, occurring in these nations at the moment.

The lack of present-day tyrannical bloodlust in the remaining socialist nations of our world does not mean that socialism no longer poses a threat. Indeed, the threat of atrocity remains latent within.

Socialism requires at its very core that the state, representing the collective, supersede in all ways the rights and dignities of the individual. It is not possible within the scheme of socialism to speak of the natural rights of individuals. As such, the state represents a concentration of power — of force — within the few hands of the socialist ruling cadres. Nothing intrinsically restrains the tyrannical exercise of this force in a fully socialist nation. No individual rights are recognized; therefore, there are no individual rights to infringe. In the name of enforcing “fairness,” anyone, for any arbitrary reason, may be suppressed.

Whether it be called communism, Nazism, socialism, or even progressivism, the kernel of absolute tyranny lies within the heart of the socialist doctrine. It cannot be expunged. It is intrinsic to the ideology, as the history of socialism amply demonstrates.

Socialists promise to deliver a better world that provides equality of outcomes for everyone. But that is only an illusion, a bit of propaganda aimed at the gullible. Those who really want to see an improved world, with greater prosperity for all and respect for the individual, need to look elsewhere. They need to look to limited government, diffusion of power, and respect of individual natural rights.

If you really want a better world, then fight not for socialism; fight for freedom.

Photo at top shows a British officer standing before a mass grave at the Nazi Bergen-Belsen death camp: AP Images

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