

POLITICAL TENDENCY: A BEGINNER'S GUIDE

A CRASH COURSE IN LEFTIST IDEOLOGY

**WRITTEN & EDITED BY
THE DENTON LEFT**



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Marxism	2
Leninism	4
Marxism-Leninism	5
Maoism	6
Trotskyism	7
Left-Communism	9
Democratic Socialism	10
Anarchism	11
Anarcho-Communism	12
Anarcho-Syndicalism	13
Insurrecto-Nihilism	14
Democratic Confederalism	15
Other Tendencies	16
Glossary	21

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MARXISM

- There are ultimately two social classes: the proletariat and the bourgeoisie.
- The proletariat is the workers, and they must sell their labor to the bourgeoisie. The bourgeoisie owns the means of production.
- The means of production are the facilities, machinery, tools, and materials used to produce goods and services. In Marx's time, the factory was the quintessential means of production. The means of production also include the means of distribution and related vehicles and infrastructure both physical and virtual
- Workers are alienated from the products of their labor under capitalism in that, once they make the "product", it becomes the property of the capitalist who owns the means of production.
- The "labor theory of value" states that the value of a commodity is dependent on the amount of labor necessary for its production.
- Profit is value created by the worker that has been expropriated by the capitalist.
- Class consciousness is the realization that your position in society is defined by your relationship to the means of production.
- According to Marx, only a class-conscious proletariat is capable of revolution.

- Capital is, in the most neutral of terms, produced goods that are used as an input into the production of more goods and services. One example could be profits that are reinvested into a business to help it grow. Marx viewed capital as a social relation that exploits workers.
- Socialism is a society in which workers control the means of production. For Marx, it is the transitory stage before communism
- A communist society, according to Marx, is one that has developed to the point of being fully classless.
- Marx and Engels championed scientific socialism rooted in a materialist outlook as opposed to the idealistic utopian socialism prominent at the time. Scientific socialism--which became historical materialism--used data and historical trends to predict and explain historical and economic conditions.



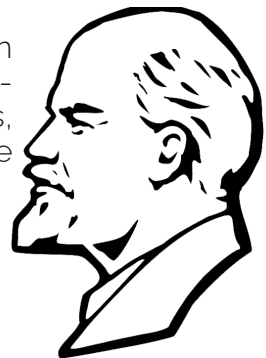
Karl Marx

LENINISM

- Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov (1870-1924), or Vladimir Lenin as you may know him, advocated democratic centralism. He believed that, while ideas must be debated and criticized, action must be unified after a decisive vote.
- For Lenin, the decisions of higher-up organizing bodies were binding on all members of the party, including lower bodies of the organization.
- Direct democracy was carried out through worker councils known as soviets. Only workers and peasants were allowed on the soviets to ensure a dictatorship of the proletariat.
- The dictatorship of the proletariat is not a one-person tyrannical dictatorship as we think of the word but rather the dictatorship of the proletariat class over the bourgeoisie. It ensures that the counterrevolutionary bourgeoisie cannot use the state apparatus to halt the development of a classless society.
- In *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, Lenin argues that capitalists from more developed countries will inevitably seek out new markets, new profit opportunities, and new workers even more susceptible to exploitation through imperialism.
- In *"Left-Wing" Communism: An Infantile Disorder*, Lenin argues against what he saw as premature and/or undisciplined attempts at overthrowing capital.
- The role of the vanguard party is to disseminate revolutionary ideas and win the masses over to the necessity of revolution.
- Lenin still thought organizing workers was necessary to take economic power, and that organizing the most committed and class-conscious workers into a vanguard party was necessary for taking political power.
- These conditions led Lenin to advocate the development of a vanguard party in his pamphlet *What is to be Done?*

MARXISM-LENINISM

- Marxism-Leninism, as the name suggests, synthesizes Marxism and Leninism and was the official ideology of the Soviet Union.
- It was developed by General Secretary of the Communist Party Ioseb Besarionis dze Jughashvili (1878-1953), also known as Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin, in the 1920s after Lenin's death.
- *Foundations of Leninism* is a series of lectures by Stalin published in *Pravda* in 1924. In the book, he discusses the party, the peasantry, and imperialism.
- Many of the socialist countries that have existed won their independence as Marxist-Leninists.
- There is a focus on the vanguard party as the main organ of revolution, usually this is the only party but not necessarily as seen in countries like Nepal. Democratic Centralism is also present in many of the parties.
- Marxist-Leninists today continue the important work of standing against imperialist aggression. They are some of the most committed anti-war activists operating in the US today. This is due to the tendency's heavy focus on combatting imperialism, especially from major capitalist powers like the United States.
- Each nation and/or party has its own context-specific take on Marxism-Leninism. As with many leftist tendencies, the material conditions of place and time influence tactics and ideology.



Vladimir Lenin

MAOISM

- Tactically, Maoism focuses on guerilla warfare and "surrounding the cities from the countryside."
- Unlike traditional Marxism, Maoism emphasizes the role of the rural peasantry as a revolutionary class instead of the urban proletariat.
- It also emphasizes the concept of the Mass Line which goes as follows: The demands of the party are taken from the demands of the masses. The role of the party is not to dictate demands, but to listen to the masses and assess their demands through the party's ideological framework.
- Maoists are also critical of the reforms introduced by Nikita Khrushchev and Deng Xiaoping in the Soviet Union and China respectively. They claim that these changes are revisionist, in other words, an abandonment of Marxism.



Mao Zedong

TROTSKYISM

- Lev Bronstein, or Leon Trotsky as he is more commonly known, was a friend of Lenin and one of the main organizers of the October Revolution in 1917. Trotskyism, itself, focuses on the concepts of the United Front as well as the Permanent Revolution while also incorporating Lenin's party policies for the Bolsheviks.

- After a general strike in 1905, Trotsky developed the theory of permanent revolution. Here, he came to believe in the possibility of a socialist revolution in underdeveloped/pre-industrial countries. At the time, the orthodox Marxist understanding was that pre-capitalist countries must first go through a bourgeois revolution, then a socialist one after sufficient development had taken place. He proposed instead an uninterrupted transition from the bourgeois to the socialist revolution. This necessitates the help of more advanced countries spurring a worldwide proletarian revolution.

- After an attempted revolution in Germany in 1919, Lenin and Trotsky came up with the strategy of the United Front to win over the working class to communism by working with other leftist and non-revolutionary organizations (e.g., trade unions and democratic socialists) to win them over to a revolutionary perspective.

- In response to what he saw as a detrimental turn in Soviet policy after Lenin's death, he formed the Left Opposition with other members of the Communist Party leadership to challenge the Party's leadership.

- In 1927, the Left Opposition was banned from the Party and two years later Trotsky was deported from Russia.

During his exile, he continued to write and develop an analysis of world politics.

- In a series of letters, he wrote *Fascism: What It Is and How to Fight It* where he warns about the crisis of fascism and analyzes the conditions that gave rise to it.
- In 1938, the Fourth International was formed and was the foundation for the Trotskyist movements that followed.
- After his assassination in 1940 by a Soviet agent, Trotskyism has been held up as an alternative to Marxism-Leninism while still adhering to the values of Leninism. This has led to some conflict between the two tendencies.



Leon Trotsky

LEFT COMMUNISM

- Not to be confused with the left communism of Lenin's time, this tendency criticizes Marxism-Leninism and participation in government elections.

- Rosa Luxemburg (1871-1919) criticized both the Bolsheviks for the undemocratic nature of their party and the German social democrats (SPD) for endorsing WWI. Instead of a vanguard party, Luxemburg favored a more council communist/syndicalist approach to democracy. Left communists were heavily influenced by her writings.

- Amadeo Bordiga (13 June 1889 – 23 July 1970) considered the Soviet Union to be capitalist in nature and all Marxist-Leninist states as well as Fascist states to be the ultimate expression of bourgeois democracy.

- The three main branches of left communism are:

- Council communism, which favors decentralization and democracy via worker councils (or soviets).

- Autonomism, which emerged in Italy in the 1960s and championed resistance outside traditional party politics.

- Situationism, a tendency skeptical of calling itself such that arose out of the Avant Garde art movement and was influential in the 1968 riots in France. Although Marxists, they were skeptical of the state. They opposed traditional culture and routines and advocated the creation of "situations" that would unlock the possibility for more organic and fulfilling experiences. It is mostly associated with Communization, a tactic of mixing insurrectionary anarchism with left communism.



DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISM

- Democratic socialists seek a transition to socialism through a combination of electoral politics and movements for reforms.
- Although social democrats (mentioned in the “Other Tendencies” section) stop at reforming capitalism, many democratic socialists seek to realize worker-controlled means of production through a gradual process. Most socialist parties in western countries adhere to either social democracy or Democratic Socialism.
- Democratic socialists seek to build broad alliances. In the end, politics is a numbers game.
- The major Democratic Socialist organization in the US is the DSA (Democratic Socialists of America), a group founded in 1982 to pull the Democratic party to the political left.
- While building support for more foundational restructuring, they fight for reforms such as Medicare for All, rent control, student debt cancellation, and the Green New Deal.



ANARCHISM

- Pierre-Joseph Proudhon was the first philosopher to self-identify as an anarchist and in 1840, he wrote *What is Property?* declaring that the very concept of property was theft.



Pierre-Joseph Proudhon

- Proudhon called his anarchism "mutualist socialism", which is the basis for mutualism, a left-wing, market-based anarchist tendency.

- Inspired by Proudhon's mutualism, Bakunin started a movement known as collectivist anarchism, which called for the abolition of both the state and private property. He was concerned that revolutionaries would just become the new tyrants if they took power. His group joined the First International but were expelled in 1872.

- From there, Peter Kropotkin and the anarcho-communists carried the torch. They were inspired by the Paris Commune and advocated the distribution of resources according to need.

- Anarchism opposes the state and other forms of hierarchy.

- There have always been people who have lived more or less as anarchists on the margins of society.

- Anarchists advocate social affiliations based on free association, self-determination, and decentralization.

- Although they are not officially anarchist organizations, anarchists today often organize with the IWW, Food Not Bombs, and environmentalist direct action in addition to local collectives and affinity groups.

ANARCHO-COMMUNISM

- Anarcho-communists argue for the abolition of exchange value by way of “labor notes”, or vouchers, based on work performed. They believe that having a form of currency will invariably reproduce the issues of unequal capital accumulation and authority.
- Anarcho-communism was formulated in opposition to the mutualists (Proudhon) and the collectivist anarchists (Bakunin). The main disagreement stems from how things will be distributed after the revolution. In *The Conquest of Bread*, Kropotkin explains anarcho-communism and imagines what such a society would look like.
- Ricardo Flores Magón and his brothers developed a strain of anarcho-communism known as “*Magonismo*” that combined indigenous community organizing with anarchism.
- Magón's ideas helped inspire the 1910 Mexican Revolution and later the Zapatistas of the 1990s claimed to inherit the legacy of Magonismo.



Ricardo Flores Magón

ANARCHO-SYNDICALISM

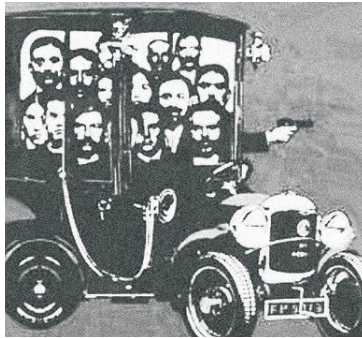
- Anarcho-Syndicalism is primarily based on the labor movement and labor organizing. "Syndicalism" comes from the French word "syndicat", which means "trade union". The syndicates serve as both the organ for revolutionary change and the model for the future organization of society.
- Although very similar to Marxism, Anarcho-Syndicalists reject the need for a transitory workers' state (i.e. dictatorship of the proletariat) or advocacy for a political party.
- Rudolf Rocker is regarded as the founder of anarcho-syndicalism while working with the CGT (Confédération Générale du Travail) in France.
- In Spain, the CNT (Confederación Nacional del Trabajo) was one of the main groups fighting fascism during the Spanish Civil War.
- In 1905, the IWW (Industrial Workers of the World) was formed in the US as "one big union" and has a diverse and radical history. It continues to organize to this day.



Rudolf Rocker

INSURRECTO-NIHILISM

- Some anarchists think attempts to maintain formal organizations is inorganic and dooms you to recreate the problems of hierarchical organizing.
- These comrades tend to focus on spontaneous insurrectionary moments and movements where organization happens organically and in real-time.
- Disillusioned leftists respond in different ways. Some drop out entirely, but others form communitarian associations and stay ready for the next upswing in the struggle.
- Comrades skeptical of organizing may follow in the tradition of groups like Bash Back! and Afro-pessimism.
- They focus on the destruction of the ideals of enlightenment, morality, and humanism.



Caricature of the Bonnot Gang, the most famous French anarchist group

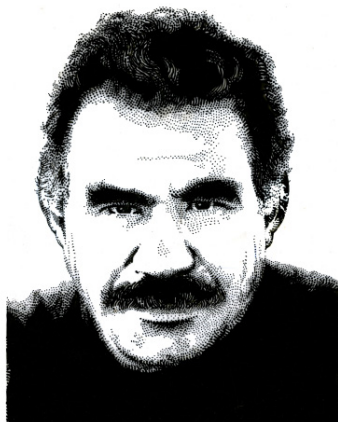
DEMOCRATIC-CONFEDERALISM

- A relatively new tendency developed by Abdullah Öcalan (1949-Present) after reading the work of Murray Bookchin (1921-2006) while in prison.

- Like Bookchin's Communalism, Democratic Confederalism promotes a decentralized organization of different local assemblies as well as feminism, ecology, and a multicultural society.

- Jineology, an outlook that is built on the liberation of women and the filling of scientific and sociological gaps through this liberation, is also promoted heavily in the tendency. While it is usually described as a feminist analysis, it offers a critique of feminism as well focusing on its lack of a transformational system for men, absence of an alternative life model, and its blind spot towards eastern theories of women's liberation.

- Democratic Confederalism is the main ideology of Rojava, a region in Syria that, with the help of many communists, socialists, and anarchists from around the world, has been fighting both ISIS and the invading army of Turkey.



Abdullah Öcalan

OTHER TENDENCIES

These are some other schools of leftist thought. Many of them originate either from a single leader, a specific area, or a past movement and are relatively small or off-shoots of other groups.

- *Anarcha-Feminism*: a school of thought that views capitalism, patriarchy, and the state as inextricably linked authoritarian systems that must be opposed
- *Anarcho-Primitivism*: Primitivists critique the notions of progress, development, and civilization. They advocate deindustrialization and the abandonment of certain technologies and social structures.
- *Blanquism*: In the tradition of the ideas of Louis Auguste Blanqui (1805-1881), Blanquists believed that socialism should be established by way of a coup carried out by a small group of conspirators rather than by the revolutionary action of the working class.
- *Bolivarianism*: Named after Simón Bolívar (1783-1830), also known as "El Libertador" for helping many South American countries gain independence from the Spanish Empire. Bolivarianism in Venezuela is primarily associated with Hugo Chavez's anti-imperialist policies that included the nationalization of industries, the expansion of welfare, and participatory democracy.
- *Egoism*: An individualist school of thought that rejects moralism. It originated with Max Stirner and influenced individualist anarchism.
- *Eurocommunism*: From 1968 to the 1980s, there was a trend of Western European communist parties organizing

separately from the Soviet Union. Many of the parties were socially democratic and sought to gain power electorally within their country and more or less made concessions to their more traditionally communist supporters.

- *Fourierism*: Sometimes referred to as "associationism", this tendency emphasized the establishment of a phalanx or Phalanstère, a self-contained community that occupied one or a series of buildings. Charles Fourier (1772–1837) was an early advocate for free love and coined the term "feminism". His followers went on to attempt the establishment of communes in America, including the famous *La Réunion* in Dallas, Texas.

- *Hoxhaism*: A tendency named after Albanian communist leader Enver Hoxha formed after a split between the Chinese Communist Party and the Party of Labor in Albania in 1978. Hoxhaism is committed to carrying on the legacy of Stalin and considers many other parties as revisionist.

- *Icarians*: A short-lived French ideology from the 1840s inspired by the allegorical novel *Voyage en Icarie*. It embodied a religious socialism with an emphasis on education and cultural development. Attempted to start a commune in Denton, Texas as well as other cities in the United States but all failed for different reasons.

- *Intercommunalism*: The official ideology of the Black Panther Party. Rejecting traditional (at the time) definitions of nationalism, internationalism, and decolonization, Intercommunalism emphasizes the struggle of the global scattered communities against capitalist imperialism.

- *Juche*: Rooted in Marxism-Leninism, but declared to be a departure from it, Juche is the official ideology of the DPRK (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) or "North Korea". It stresses the self-reliance of the nation, the importance of the masses driving history, militarism, and the expression

of the people through the "Great Leader".

- *Luxemburgism*: Originating from Rosa Luxemburg's critique of the Bolsheviks and SPD, this tendency promotes the spontaneity of working-class action with organizing and shuns formulaic and undemocratic tactics.

- *Mao Zedong Thought*: Considered to be Marxism–Leninism applied to the particularities of the Chinese Revolution.

- *Mutualism*: An anarchist form of market socialism rooted in what Proudhon called "mutualist socialism." Mutualists favor worker associations and condemn the centralized hierarchy of the state-controlled market. They advocate for workers' control of the means of production and argue for a free association of communes that use direct democracy. Proudhon imagined a mutualist society in which artists and workers would create their own markets without the state controlling them and use a system of "labor vouchers" as currency.

- *Neozapatism*: The official ideology of the Zapatista movement in the mountainous region of Chiapas, Mexico. It combines feminism, the Mayan culture of the area, and libertarian Marxism into a local context.

- *Posadism*: Founded by J. Posadas in Argentina, a variant of Trotskyism that expressed enthusiasm for nuclear war as a means of destroying capitalism and providing the opportunity for the working class to build socialism in the immediate aftermath. Posadas became enamored with the idea of communication with dolphins and advocated for their participation in the revolution. Posadas also introduced elements of ufology into Marxism by advocating for collaboration with aliens believing that their mastery of advanced technologies could be used in the interests of Earth's working class. This tendency is treated mostly as a

as a joke among leftists.

- *Prachanda Path*: A MLM tendency in Nepal named after the Unified Communist Party of Nepal leader commonly known as Prachanda. It claims to be an extension of Maoism for the conditions of Nepal and includes joining with the other main communist party in the country for electoral goals.
- *Principally Maoist*: A sub tendency of Maoism that believes Maoism is the highest stage of Marxism. That is to say, in order to be a Marxist-Leninist, you must be a Maoist.
- *Queer Anarchism*: Given their anti-authoritarian nature, anarchists were early proponents of queer liberation. This tendency advocates anarchism as a means for LGBT+ liberation.
- *Social Democracy*: A leftist tendency that abandons the idea of freedom from capitalism and seeks to restrict its worst qualities instead. Social democrats advocate for policies that give benefits to people through government programs and participation in elections. Not to be confused with Democratic Socialists.
- *Third Worldism*: A tendency that prioritizes the struggles of the Third World over those in the First World. Third Worldists maintain that the working class in the First World is part of a labor aristocracy that actively benefits from the underdevelopment of the Third World. As part of the process of achieving a global people's war, they unconditionally (though not uncritically) support all struggles for national liberation against imperialism and for full self-determination.
- *Titoism*: Titoism is named for Josip Broz Tito, president of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Tito opposed Soviet control and attempted to form a bloc of nonaligned states during the Cold War. This didn't work out, but Tito

managed to keep Yugoslavia itself united despite conflicting separatist tendencies within the country. After his death in 1980, however, these internal tensions - compounded by economic collapse - led to the Yugoslav Wars in the 1990s.



**THERE IS NO PERFECT
TENDENCY AND THERE ARE
NO PERFECT PEOPLE.**

**JUST COMRADES YOU TRUST
TO BE THERE WHEN SHIT
GOES DOWN.**

GLOSSARY

Affinity Group - A small group of comrades who autonomously work together on direct action and other projects.

Afro-pessimism - A lens of interpretation that accounts for society's denial of black subjecthood and its dependence on anti-black violence

Alienation - Workers are alienated from the products of their labor in that the goods and services they produce are owned by the capitalists they work for rather than themselves.

Anarcho-nihilism - The view that society is unsalvageable and must be met with hostility and negation. It opposes all authority including traditional forms of organizing.

Base - The means and relations of production.

Black Bloc - A bloc of protestors within a march who wear black and cover their faces. The tactic originated in Berlin by squatters defending themselves from police repression and neo-Nazis.

Bourgeoisie - The social class that owns the means of production.

Capital - Produced goods that are used as an input into the production of outputs. Usually expressed as reinvested profits.

Class Consciousness - The knowledge that your position in society is defined by your relationship to the means of production.

Communism - The state of a society that has developed beyond class distinctions.

Decolonization - The expulsion of colonial governments and ideas. For Marx and Lenin, those fighting imperial powers were allies in the fight against the European bourgeoisie.

Democratic Centralism - An organizational structure in which ideas are debated, but action must be unified after a decisive vote. The decisions of higher-up organizing bodies are binding on all members of the party, including lower bodies of the organization.

Dialectic - The dialectical method is a process for analyzing change and/or evolution through contradiction. It consists of a thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. The thesis is the original idea or statement, the antithesis is the direct reaction and contradiction to the thesis, this contradiction then gives rise to a synthesis that resolves the contradiction.

Dictatorship of the Proletariat - The dictatorship of the proletariat class over the bourgeoisie to ensure that the counterrevolutionary bourgeoisie cannot use the state apparatus to halt the development of a classless society.

Direct Action - Using your own power to act in your own interest instead of appealing to a higher authority.

Dual Power - A division of power between traditional institutions and counter-institutions in a pre-revolutionary situation.

Enlightenment - An 18th-century philosophical movement that championed logic, science, and humanism.

Exploitation - The act of treating someone unfairly for your benefit. For leftists, this focuses on how capitalists abuse

their power over their employees and pay them less than the value of their labor in pursuit of profit.

False Consciousness - The inability to recognize one's true position in society based on one's relationship to the means of production; is often used to indicate how ideology is used against the working class.

Guerilla Gardening - Also known as "Seed Bombing", it is the act of illegally gardening on privately owned land that has been abandoned or otherwise neglected.

Historical Materialism - The scientific analysis of how material conditions bear on historic and economic trends.

Ideology - In post-Marxian philosophy, it is the set of ideas, values, and beliefs that are held and reproduced to justify the status quo of a given community even in the face of contradictory information. Slavoj Žižek famously called it a "trash can" from which we are "eating all the time".

Imperialism - When a country imposes its rule or influence on a foreign nation. For Marxists, this is because the imperialist country is looking to expand markets, create and exploit vulnerabilities, and secure the global domination of capital.

Insurrection - An open and disruptive uprising against an authority or government.

Labor Theory of Value - The value of a commodity is dependent on the amount of labor necessary for its production.

Lifestylism - Used by Murray Bookchin as a pejorative against anarcho-primitivists and individualist anarchists; it refers to the preference of lifestyle choices as a means of

dismantling capitalism (e.g. not working) as opposed to organizing the working class.

Mass Line - The Maoist practice of listening to the demands of the masses and basing the focus of the party on these concerns.

Materialism - The philosophical emphasis on the material world as the foundation for thoughts and ideas.

Means of Production - The facilities, machinery, tools, and materials used to produce goods and services.

Mode of Production - The combination of the productive forces (means of production/human labor) and the relations of production (relationship between classes).

Mutual Aid - A voluntary exchange of skills and resources that does not reproduce the hierarchical, dehumanizing, and often exploitative nature of charity.

Peasant - pre-industrial agricultural worker with limited land ownership.

Political Economy - the study of the means of production in order to better understand their relationship to the economic, political, and social spheres of capitalism.

Proletariat - workers, or the social class that must sell their labor.

Propaganda of the Deed - the use of action to ignite insurrection and/or inspire revolutionary action

Revisionist - describing offshoots of Marxism that require a break with fundamental theory, often used to describe reformist tendencies that don't centralize class struggle

Socialism - a society where workers control the means of production

Soviet - Russian word for worker's council. They are a form of political organization that consists of elected, immediately recallable delegates within a region or county.

Spontaneity (Revolutionary) - an organizational tendency that believes the revolutionary moment should be led by the spontaneous action of the working class instead of being led by a party and/or professional revolutionaries

Superstructure - the legal, political, and ideological structure; anything that isn't the base

Surplus Value/Profit - the value created by the worker that has been expropriated by the capitalist

Utopian Socialism - Futuristic visions of cooperative society often implemented in small experimental communities. Some of these experiments preceded the communist manifesto and focused more on cooperation than on class struggle.

Vanguard Party - A centralized party of workers militantly committed to the class struggle and political education of the working class.

Permanent Revolution - Trotsky's theory that underdeveloped countries could skip the bourgeois-democratic revolution and go right into a socialist revolution. This would be achievable only through an international socialist revolution. This was opposed to Stalin's "socialism in one country."

United Front - The strategy of uniting with non-revolutionary working-class organizations against a common struggle and attempting to win them over to a revolutionary perspective.

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