



Heaven On Earth: The Rise and Fall of Socialism (Brief Encounters)

By Joshua Muravchik

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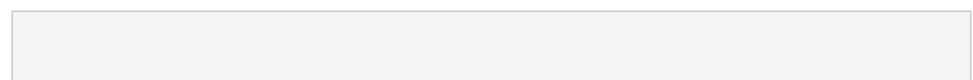
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Socialism was man's most ambitious attempt to supplant religion with a doctrine claiming to ground itself in "science." Indeed, no religion ever spread so far so fast. Yet while socialism had established itself as a fact of life by the beginning of the 20th century, it did not create societies of abundance or give birth to "the New Man." Each failure inspired new searches for the path to the promised land: revolution, communes, social democracy, Communism, Fascism, Third World socialism. None worked, and some exacted staggering human tolls. Then, after two hundred years of wishful thinking and fitful governance, socialism suddenly imploded in a fin du siecle drama of falling walls and collapsing regimes.

In Heaven on Earth, Joshua Muravchik traces this fiery trajectory through sketches of the thinkers and leaders who developed the theory, led it to power, and presided over its collapse. We see such dreamers and doers as the French revolutionary Gracchus Babeuf, whose "Conspiracy of Equals" were the first to try to outlaw private property; Robert Owen, who hoped to plant a model socialist utopia in the United States; Friedrich Engels, who created the cult of Karl Marx and "scientific" socialism; Benito Mussolini, self proclaimed socialist heretic and inventor of Fascism; Clement Attlee, who rejected the fanatics and set out to build socialism democratically in Britain; Julius Nyerere, who merged social democracy and communism in the hope of making Tanzania a model for the developing world; and Mikhail Gorbachev, Deng Xiaoping and Tony Blair, who became socialism's inadvertent undertakers.

Muravchik's accomplishment in Heaven on Earth is to tell a story filled with character and event while at the same time giving us an epic chronicle of a movement that tried to turn the world upside down—and for a time succeeded.

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Bibliography

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Editorial Review

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Just a few generations ago, socialism was regarded as the wave of the future by millions of "enlightened" thinkers across the world; the promise of socialism motivated hard-line Marxists, Western-educated men of the Third World who fought for political independence, and Americans and Europeans repelled by the inequalities of capitalism. Now, of course, socialism is widely discredited; even former Communists in Eastern Europe proclaim allegiance to a market economy. This engrossing history of various socialist movements is told through portraits of the leaders who provided the intellectual and political support for those movements. With eloquence, skepticism, and even sympathy, Muravchik examines the careers of figures as varied as Friedrich Engels, Clement Atlee, and Julius Nyerere. Although each had a somewhat different interpretation of socialism, they all shared the fatal assumption that they could use the coercive power of the state to "improve" human nature. This is an important work and an object lesson showing great harm is frequently done by those with the purest motives. *Jay Freeman*
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Review

"In this sweeping and accessible survey, Muravchik places his focus on the personalities who determined the shifting fortunes of socialism."

About the Author

Joshua Muravchik

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