



Socialism: A Very Short Introduction

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Today, most people think of socialism as an outdated ideology. In this Very Short Introduction, Michael Newman seeks to place the idea of socialism in a modern context for today's readers. He explains socialist ideas in the framework of its historical evolution, from the French Revolution to the present day, and examines practical attempts to implement socialism.

Not just another history of socialist ideas, this book aims for a different approach that looks at practice as well as theory--centering on the contrast between Communism and Social Democracy. The relationship between socialism and notions of democracy, freedom, and equality is also discussed. Newman brings the subject entirely up to date by tackling contemporary forms of socialism. While the book's focus is on Europe and the Soviet Union, it is set in a broader geographical context. Newman's fresh approach to the subject enables the reader to re-evaluate socialism.

About the Series: Combining authority with wit, accessibility, and style, **Very Short Introductions** offer an introduction to some of life's most interesting topics. Written by experts for the newcomer, they demonstrate the finest contemporary thinking about the central problems and issues in hundreds of key topics, from philosophy to Freud, quantum theory to Islam.

Socialism: A Very Short Introduction Details

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Author : Michael Newman

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From Reader Review Socialism: A Very Short Introduction for online ebook

Keeko says

This is just what I hoped, a clear, interesting introduction, and I learned a lot. I kept my hand over the title when I was reading it in public so I wouldn't have to deal with people flipping out. It's an interesting subject, and I like how he presented all the pros and cons. I also like the quote at the end from Oscar Wilde, "A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not even worth glancing at for it leaves out the one country where Humanity is always landing. And when Humanity lands there, it looks out, and seeing a better country, sets sail. Progress is the realization of Utopias."

Rachel Ruddick says

My pet peeve with educational non fiction is if they feel like a few Wikipedia pages strung together. Even a short book about socialism is capable of saying something interesting about the subject. The author attempts no such thing and listlessly goes through the motions, describing its history, case studies, its factions then some thought on its future. I put it down with a shrug. Q

Harold says

Really it should be three and a half. A valuable reference but it lost a star because I found the writing a little too drab. I've decided I need a better grounding in the meaning of these terms we hear tossed about constantly by manipulative politicians and talking heads. Manipulators are using terms like "Marxist" and "Socialist" knowing that too many people really have NO clue as to what they really mean and simply accept the negative connotation implied. Hence when I come across something like this I grab it - as I did another book in this series about Karl Marx. Now I know that Karl Marx wasn't what the term Marxist came to mean (and said as much in his lifetime) and that Socialism is not the same as Communism. I know I don't favor a communist system any more than I would favor a conservative system. I also know that I'm not in the middle on that equation.

Clif says

I'm hooked! Thanks to a review by another Goodreads contributor, Hrishabh Chaudhary, I discovered the "A Very Short Introduction" series produced by Oxford University. With dozens of titles covering subjects from physics to Aristotle, scholars take on the challenge of making what could easily be off-putting issues covered in lengthy books into concise and readable short texts. Think of the project as one that appeals to those who might be attracted by the "Idiots" or "Dummies" series but don't want the forced humor and do want the meat of the subject in simple prose that is respectful of the reader's intelligence. What's more, the books in the series are widely available used on the Internet for two or three dollars.

A Very Short Introduction to Socialism is my first read in this series and I am delighted to say that it delivers. Michael Newman looks over the history of Socialism beginning in the 18th century with the

Utopians and the Anarchists before the name of socialism was assigned. He follows the development through Marx to the fork in the movement into Social Democracy in Western Europe and Communism in the Soviet Union.

Socialism is a challenge to Capitalism, one that seeks to divide up the wealth of society into a more just distribution than allowing it all to flow without limit to the top, something Americans are very familiar with from the experience of the last few decades.

Should this be done by working within Capitalist democratic systems to modify how the system works (see Bernie Sanders, the "democratic Socialist") or through the upset of revolution? Both routes have been taken and to date neither has been absolutely successful over the long term. Soviet Communism collapsed and Scandinavian Socialism is just holding its own. North Korea? Don't ask!

Capitalism, because of its unequalled ability to deliver goods of every kind from potato chips to smartphones, has prevailed. Now, more than ever, the globalization of the economy makes any attempt at spreading the wealth within a nation even more difficult. The best that can be done is regulation, and as we have seen with the giant banks, regulation is very hard to impose in the face of the great established power that opposes it, particularly when billionaires have manipulated a major party in the United States into advocating against the interests of the little guy. Established wealth has, with the benefit of wholly owned media that confuses rather than illuminates, turned the occupants of the camp of the have-nots against themselves.

The hope of economic classes in conflict with the greater number in the working class prevailing - the idea of Karl Marx - has not been successful. This little book will tell you why as author Newman peppers his observations with trenchant insights. Suddenly the easily confusing political events of the 20th century will become clear.

What a shame this text is not required reading in every high school in America. To be a responsible voter, one should understand the political conflict, the ideas that underlie the emotional appeals of politicians. Too often in a democracy, ignorance troops to the polls, if it manages to get out the front door on election day.

Not content to simply outline the history of Socialism, Newman also gives a detailed look at two examples: Sweden, a successful implementation of Social Democracy that is now challenged, and Cuba, a Communist state that has had remarkable successes in providing services yet has been hard put to create an economy that can provide over the long term.

Newman continues with a look at movements that could be called socialist: feminism and environmentalism.

This little book succeeds impressively in reaching the goal of the whole series - education.

You'll have to excuse me now because I'm already deep into my second book of the series and many more are coming in the mail. Yes, it's an addiction, but not an expensive one!

Sujan says

The book begins with a discussion on both the theories and practices of different socialistic thoughts, although it concentrates on the two most dominant socialist doctrines, viz. communism and social democracy. Then it shows both pros and cons of these socialist traditions. Finally it ends with an optimistic tone for socialists, delivering the scopes where socialism can be still considered relevant and giving a brief suggestion on how to learn from the past, rectify the errors, and embrace the new challenges for socialists

like the issues of feminism, green movement, and, the lower number of working class citizens.

Humanity cannot forgo the desire to achieve equality, which is the ultimate objective of any socialist tradition. This perennial and universal desire confirms socialism is, and will be relevant for the time being.

Todd Wright says

A Very Short Summary - Socialism is a spectrum, no group has the authority to define its meaning, thus Socialism is fragmented. Socialism will likely fail due to prejudice.

Arghya Dutta says

Socialism, by Michael Newman, is a book which is lucid and thoughtful, accessible yet undiluted and informative without being boring. It is *extremely* difficult to write a comprehensive book on a topic like Socialism that fits in the Very Short Introduction category, and the author has done an impressive job in achieving that feat. I am glad that I have read this book.

What I specially like about this book is its focus on some topics that are elaborated upon, well, not too frequently. After defining the basic tenets of Socialism in brief, the author discussed, in some detail, about the existent Socialist tradition before Marx came up with his own theory of Scientific Socialism. I liked the informative analysis on the early Utopians like the popular, but theoretically not so convincing, Etienne Cabet and more sound theorists like Henri de Saint-Simon, Charles Fourier and Robert Owens. Then the Anarchist theories of Proudhon and Bakunin, who were contemporary of Marx, and voiced, in most cases, against his and Engels' theory, were also discussed in some detail. Mind you, this studies were interspersed with the author's thoughtful comment throughout, which were really good. I can not resist quoting one of Proudhon's utterances

To be governed is to be watched over, inspected, spied on, directed, legislated at, regulated, docketed, indoctrinated, preached at, controlled, assessed, weighed, censored, ordered about, by men who have neither the right nor the knowledge nor the virtue That's government, that's its justice, that's its morality!

What an observation! I am not simplistically saying that it is correct universally, but just admiring Proudhon's passion for his fellow men and for liberty in every aspect.

One of the most notable features of this book is that it scarcely discussed about Marxism as implemented in Russia, North Vietnam (too dictatorial) and China (too much Capitalist invasion). Instead we get a thorough discussion of Cuban and Sweden's socialism; interesting! Also the enrichment, and fragmentation, of Socialist ideal after the rise of Feminist and Left-Green movement were not left. This sort of book can only be written when the author is not oblivious to a system's faults and yet sympathetic towards it. Now, I am not knowledgeable enough in Socialists' traditions to find where the author's biases lie, and subsequently if this book is lopsided, but at least it did not feel in that way.

Highest recommendations!

cover very complicated and lengthy terrain in a 100 or so pages. Socialism is duly hard as it is both internally and externally contested as a term, has 200 years of emerging and failing models and critiques, and has probably become even more polarizing in opinions since this book was written. Newman's focus on traditions in the first chapter, case studies in the second, historical problems in the third, and new ideas on emerging socialism in the fourth chapter does focus the reader, Newman does not downplay nor make an apologia for either Soviet communism or social democracy, he fairly presents both the promise and problems of post-1968 new leftism and social democracy's problematic dependence on Keynesianism post-world war two

If there are some criticisms to be launched here: Newman does not present many of the center and right critiques of socialism in much detail and then cannot present socialist answers to those critiques. Furthermore, he does leave out entire non-anarchist and non-utopian socialist traditions which were critical of both social democracy and Leninism. Still space was hardly there for this discussion. If one is a novice, this is an excellent introduction and if one is a specialist then the case studies on Sweden and Cuba are worth the price of the book.

Remy says

This is a pretty decent introduction. It should probably be called "*History of Socialism*" though. I have a much better idea of the timelines involved now, with respect to pre-Marxist Utopianism, Soviet style Communism, Maoism, Third Way, etc. However, while the book outlines the main differences between approaches, it doesn't really get into what socialism actually entails. I don't really feel like I understand the actual concepts any more than I did before. Also, the book discusses Social Democracy at length, but literally never once mentions Democratic Socialism. Finally, the writing style is a little repetitive and lacks flair. I can't in good conscience give this book more than 3 stars, but for lack of any alternative brief introductions, I still recommend it.

Mark McKenny says

I think this book does all that it's meant to do. Give you a very short introduction to Socialism, and point you in the right direction of what/who to read next. A great little series of books.

Ahmad Sharabiani says

Socialism: A Very Short Introduction (Very Short Introductions #126), Michael Newman

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