Left-wing movements in Europe through time

Authors: Margaret Larson, Katarzyna Jaklewicz, María Barriuso, Robert Richter, Hanna-Maria Paul, Linus Hackenberg

Left-wing political parties are present in the political landscape of countries all over the world. In this article we analyse the development of left parties in four countries, namely Spain, Ireland, Poland and Germany. We trace the history from the origin of those parties until today. Special emphasis is laid upon the question of how the Russian Revolution influenced those movements.

Before the revolution

How did the ideas of the Russian Revolution develop? What was the significance of existing socialist parties in Europe?

The Russian Revolution had its foundation in the ideas of Marx and Engels, as put forth in The Communist Manifesto. When Marx and Engels started to publish their ideas, these ideas were obviously not completely new, but had existed for quite some time in many different ways. However, Marx and Engels wrote them down in the context of the rapid changes due to the Industrial Revolution. These ideas then spread: at first in Great Britain and Germany, but later on all over the world.

Many small communist and Marxist groups were founded by intellectuals in Germany and elsewhere, but it was not until the 1850s and 1860s when industrial workers started to form local workers unions. A landmark event of this period was the foundation of the International Workingmen's Association in London in 1864. The first international meeting was attended by European radicals including French delegates, Irish and Polish nationalists, and German socialists including Karl Marx.[1] Across Europe workers' movements were instrumental in laying the groundwork for the growth of socialism and leftist parties.

The origins of Spanish workers movements also date to this period. The Spanish section of the First International started its development thanks to the influence of Giuseppe Fanelli, an Italian who came to Spain to spread the ideas of the revolutionary anarchist Bakunin. Therefore, the Spanish section of the First International had a mainly anarchist ideology.[2]

---

[1] Saul K. Padover (ed. and trans.), "Introduction: Marx's Role in the First International," in Karl Marx, *The Karl Marx Library, Volume 3: On the First International.* Saul K. Padover, ed. and trans. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1971; pg. xiv.

[2] https://web.archive.org/web/20140117103029/http://www.sagaplanet.com/modules/smartsection/item.php?itemid=154&easiestml_lang=en

In 1863 the ADAV (Allgemeiner Deutscher Arbeiterverein – General Workers Union of Germany) was founded out of the desire to form a governing body for already existent local workers unions. Many members of the growing working class had the feeling the existing liberal parties did not represent them. The ADAV called for the *"improvement of the state of the working class in political, material and mental regards"* [3]. The chairman of ADAV was Ferdinand Lassalle, a very charismatic man, who was able to inspire his audiences. He, however, was not a person with quite a democratic mindset: The ADAV slowly became a very centrist organisation, very much focussed on its chairman, with almost no room for debates and discussions.

That is the reason why advocates of the German proletariat and workers felt the need to found a political party which represented their ideals. Thus, in 1869 August Bebel and Wilhelm Liebknecht founded The Social Democratic Workers Party Of Germany (SDAP). The founding of this party united two very different approaches to Marxism and Socialism represented by Bebel and Liebknecht. While August Bebel actually was the son of a family of workers with his father being a soldier, Liebknecht actually was born into a bourgeois family, with his father being a Professor of Theology at university. The SDAP now was shaped by the idea of democracy. Bebel and Liebknecht believed Socialism should be achieved through democratic elections whereas Lassalle, son of a Jewish merchant, just wanted to hold the power. One more key difference between the SDAP and the ADAV is that as opposed to the leader-focussed ADAV, the SDAP made dual leadership mandatory.[4] In its first party programme the SDAP wrote: *"The current political and social circumstances are unfair to the highest degree possible and thus need to be combatted. The fight for the liberation of the working class is not a fight for privileges, but a for equal rights and duties and the abolition of class domination."* [5]

In 1875 the ADAV and the SDAP merged to form the SAPD (Socialist Workers Party of Germany).

It was not until 1872 that Socialist ideas started to gain more support in Spain. In that year Marx's son-in-law, Paul Lafargue, arrived at the Peninsula and started to spread Marx's ideas[6]. As a result the Socialist Spanish Party (PSOE) was created in 1879, and 8 years later the trade union "General Union of Workers" (UGT) was formed.

In 1878 German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck introduced a set of new laws called *Sozialistengesetze* (Anti-Socialist laws). This carrot-and-stick policy gave social insurances to workers on the one hand but on the other hand it made socialist activities illegal. With this laws Bismarck and Kaiser Wilhelm I wanted to curb the growing wave of support behind the SAPD.

---

[3] Ferdinand Lassalle: Offenes Antwortschreiben (1. März 1863)
[4] 150 Jahre SPD: http://www.150-jahre-spd.de/meilensteine/85948/1863_gruendung_des_adav.html
[5] Sozialdemokratische Arbeiterpartei: Eisenacher Programm (1869).
[6] http://www.historiasiglo20.org/HE/10d-2.htm

However that strategy did not work and a socialist milieu evolved and in the following elections the SAPD won even more seats than ever before. Thus, in 1890 these Anti-Socialist laws were abolished. In the same year the SAPD changed its name to Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD), the name which is still used today. [7] The SPD grew constantly and in the elections of 1912 became the largest party in Germany with 34.8% of the voter share.

In Spain, the "National Confederation of Labour" (CNT)[8] was founded in 1910. This was a confederation of anarcho-syndicalist labour unions which had an important influence in, for example, peasant struggles in the countryside of Andalusia, land occupations or urban conflicts in Barcelona. However, neither of these organizations had so much impact because there were just a few industrialized regions in Spain. Therefore, they had little support.

Ireland's leftist movements also arose from a labour struggle. The socialist movement was inextricably linked with nationalism, as the fight for Irish independence came to the fore. The most prominent Irish socialists at this time were Jim Larkin, founder of the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union (ITGWU), and James Connolly, who led the armed defence of the ITGWU. Connolly was a leading Marxist theorist who had been instrumental in the formation of the Irish Socialist Republican Party in 1896, combining the two aims of national liberation and socialism, which many viewed as being in direct conflict.
The Irish Labour Party was founded in 1912 by Larkin and Connolly.
Ireland was not a highly industrialised country The most significant event of the Irish labour movement was the 1913 Dublin Strike and Lockout. Tram workers, who already faced poor conditions, long working hours and the threat of instant dismissal, were ordered to give up membership of the ITGWU or lose their jobs. Sympathetic strikes were held across the city. In response, employers implemented a lockout which affected tens of thousands of workers. The newspapers took the side of the employers. However, the strikers were supported by important Irish revolutionary figures – Padraig Pearse (leader of the 1916 Rising), Countess Markievicz (politician and revolutionary) and WB Yeats (famous Irish poet).[9]

The time before the Russian Revolution was a very difficult period in Polish history. Due to the Revolution Poland got a chance to become an independent nation after 123 years of occupation by Prussia, Austria and Russia. There were just four communist parties. The most known was National Democratic Party, headed by Roman Dmowski, a popular Polish politician. The first Polish socialist party was "The Large Proletariat". It was supported by workers of Warsaw and Lodz factories and industrial centers. "The Large Proletariat" was probably the most radical, because the main ideas of this party's ideology concerned strikes, anti-capitalism and equalities in the Polish society. Less radical, but still socialist was Polish Folk Party that tried to improve Polish economic situation. Its origin in 1913 was an effect of strikes in Russia. The most important party, that played the most important role in the Polish way to independence, was the Polish Socialist Party (PPS). Their major aims were privileges

---

[7] 150 Jahre SPD: http://www.150-jahre-spd.de/meilensteine/85952/1869_gruendung_der_sdap.html
[8] http://www.cnt.es/que_es_cnt
[9] http://www.historyireland.com/20th-century-contemporary-history/the-dublin-1913-lockout/

for workers and making Poland an independent country. Finally, they managed to it, thanks to the head of that party – Jozef Pilsudski.

Ireland, like Russia, experienced a period of revolution in the late 1910s. The 1916 Easter Rising was a nationalist uprising against British rule in Ireland, and among its leaders was the socialist James Connolly. It was dismissed by writers such as Karl Radek as a 'putsch' rather than a true social revolution. Lenin, however, argued that such nationalist movements against imperialism were necessary for social revolution; he called the Rising a "blow against the power of English imperialism". The 1916 Rising had some influence on the Russian Revolution, as Lenin saw it as proof that social revolution across Europe was possible, and in fact formed a basis for the Soviet stance on national self-determination.

Lenin had also read James Connolly's 'Labour and Irish History' and held him in high regard; upon meeting Connolly's son, he said he considered Connolly "head and shoulders" above his contemporaries in the European socialist movement.

Reaction to the Revolution

How did political parties react to the events of the revolution in Russia? What did they support on the one hand and condemn on the other hand? Can we report long-term changes coined or triggered influenced by the Russian Revolution?

The world-changing event of the Russian Revolution evoked many similar pro-communist reactions in Europe like for instance in Poland, Germany and Spain but at the same time hostile responses were articulated in other european countries like Ireland.

Looking at Spain in that time, great enthusiasm can be noted down among the Spanish working class organizations. Strikes and riots shook the country, especially in the countryside of Andalusia and in the most of industrialized regions, such as Catalonia. Anarchists as well as socialists influenced the political happenings.

The Russian Revolution was welcomed by the socialist and revolutionary scene in Ireland: "The national resurgence and the general atmosphere of opposition to British imperialism contributed to this support for the Russian Revolution."[10]

A meeting was held in the Mansion House in Dublin in February 1918 in celebration of the revolution. Among the speakers were socialist politician Countess Constance Markievicz, actress and suffragette Maud Gonne, a representative of the Labour Party and a representative of the Soviet government. It was attended by a crowd of 10,000.

For Poland, the long-striven opportunity to become an independent country appeared in the realm of possibility when the Entente focussed on its priority to rebuild the Eastern front. Polish (illegal) authorities tried to use the Russian disinterest in the Polish issue to come closer to finalizing national independence.

---

[10] http://www.communistpartyofireland.ie/pairti.htm

Communist parties of Poland joined revolutionary factions. The perspective of better salaries lead to the moving of many workers from Poland to Russia.

At the same time also in Germany strong left-wing movements can be reported with massive influence on the November Revolution and therefore on the country's future.
The German November Revolution of 1918-19, strongly coined by left-wing movements, lead to many communist groups splitting up from the SPD. At the end of 1918 many of those groups including the most influential Spartacus League formed the Communist Party of Germany (KPD). The KPD - in contrast to the SPD - wanted to create a Soviet Republic in Germany.[11]

Just like in Germany, many party political developments were noted down in the left-wing scene with newly founded parties. The first Spanish communist party to be established was the Spanish Communist Party (former PCE, 1920), whose members came from the Spanish Socialist Youth. Only a short time later the second party was the Spanish Communist Workers' Party (PCOE 1921), which was founded by the wing of the Socialist Party (PSOE) who wanted to become part of the Third International. They would unite in that year in the Communist Party of Spain (PCE), a weak force because of its ideological divisions.

Nevertheless, the revolution had both an encouraging and a deterring effect. In Germany it still encouraged the Communists because for the first time a Marxist revolution was really successful and a Soviet Republic was created. On the other hand, it drew moderate Socialists and Social Democrats towards parliamentarism and provided a negative example of the rise of an autocratic regime in the name of Communism. German Socialists and Communists throughout all left-wing political parties condemned the violence and the terror of the Bolsheviks in Russia.

Even Rosa Luxemburg, leader and co-founder of the KPD stated that Lenin "uses the wrong means", making it very clear that even the KPD which supported the Soviet Republic as a governmental form did not want to abolish democracy at large and decree communism onto the people. She, who had previously been tied very closely to the Russian Bolsheviks, was astonished by the brutality with which Lenin and his followers persecuted their opponents.

The remaining SPD, now having moved more towards being centre-left, wanted Germany to become a parliamentary republic. Otto Braun, leading member of the SPD even wrote in January 1918, that the Bolsheviks established a *"reign of the sword that could not have been more brutal and reckless under the regime of the Tsar"* He demanded a *"thick, visible dividing line between us [the SPD] and the Bolsheviks". [12]*
Moreover, we should illuminate the fact that the Revolution caused a rise in radicalism on both left and right-wing ideologies in many countries.

---

[11] Luxemburg, Rosa: *Zur Russischen Revolution*
[12] Schulze, Weimar: *Germany 1917-1933* p.158

For instance in Ireland noticeable radical forces increased on the right and hostile sentiments towards socialist revolution dominated the political stage.

In the period 1916-1928 there were various attempts to establish Irish Communist parties and organisations, but internal disagreement and lack of organisation led to their failure. The political situation was inimical to communism, as were the mainstream media; the Irish Times warned in early 1918 of "the infection of Ireland by the anarchy of Bolshevism".[13]

Also in Spain the enthusiasm for a socialist revolution did not endure for long. Soon the anarchists and socialists started to find incompatibilities with the Bolshevik political control over organizations, and also with the consequences of breaking with their moderate side of the parties. Finally both rejected the regime established in Russia, and only a minority decided to create communist parties in Spain.[14]

[15] *creative commons*

Rising radicalism also played an important role in the central European country Germany. After enduring protests all over the country and political unrest the first democratic republic, the so-called Weimar Republic was proclaimed. Communist uprisings threatened the young and weak democracy. The radical development becomes evident when we have a look at the Spartacus uprising which had been crushed and the murder on Karl Liebknecht as well as on Rosa Luxemburg in January 1919. Germany came close to a civil war. However the Government managed to restore law and order.

---

[13] https://comeheretome.com/2013/09/02/backing-the-bolsheviks-dublin-1918/

[14] Avilés Farré, Juan. 'El Impacto de La Revolución Rusa En Las Organizaciones Obreras Españolas (1917-1923)'. Espacio, Tiempo Y Forma, Serie V, H. Contemporánea 13 (2000): 17–31.

[15] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German_Revolution_of_1918–19#/media/File:Spartakusaufstand_Barrikaden.jpg

1920s and 1930s

What happened after the establishment of a Communist Regime in Eastern Europe? How all of that is related with what happened in other countries? And did it increase radicalism?

In the 20s and the 30s Communist ideas spread all over Europe, so many left-wing parties were created or developed.

This share of the political ideas was partly due to the trips that some people did to the Soviet Union as a kind of pilgrimages. For instance, in Germany both communist leaders and intellectuals, like Erich Honecker, (later General Secretary of the Central Committee of the SED, the ruling party in East Germany) went to Russia in 1930 to study one year at the International Lenin-School.

Also in Ireland socialist Roddy Connolly, son of James Connolly, went to the USSR. He fought in the 1916 Rising, and joined the Socialist Party of Ireland in 1917. Between 1920 and 1921 he made several trips to Russia, where he met Vladimir Lenin. He attended the second Comintern congress in Petrograd in 1920 as a delegate of the Industrial Workers of the World.[16]

In Spain, poet Rafael Alberti or communist Dolores Ibárruri[17] also travelled to know more about this new regimen. Besides, some intellectuals (like Nobel winner Jacinto Benavente or writer Pío Baroja) created a branch of the International Association of Friends

---

[16] John Riddell (ed.), Workers of the World and Oppressed Peoples, Unite! Proceedings and Documents of the Second Congress, 1920: Volume 2. New York: Pathfinder Press, 1991; pg. 841.

[17] Carrillo, Santiago. Dolores Ibárruri: Pasionaria, Una Fuerza de La Naturaleza. Edited by Planeta. 1st ed. Barcelona, 2008

of the Soviet Union called "Amigos de la Unión Soviética"[18]. Irish people from the IRA would also create an association like that during the 30s, the "Friends of Soviet Russia".

In those years radicalism increased, and communist parties easily disappear after just a few years working, as well as many others were created.
In Poland, Revolution government denied religious lifestyle, and society was influenced by revolutionary ideas. Even they changed some streets' names, like Jan Szwaja's St. in Krakow. He was a commander of troops that attacked Polish land courts and rob aristocracy.

During the Russian Revolution, 6% of the Russian population were Poles – most of them were workers and representatives of Proletariat from Polish factories that were moved to the deep Russia. People were encouraged by means of higher salaries for their jobs.

Looking at Germany, we can see that there were many ideological differences between left-wing parties. For instance, the ties of the KPD to the Soviet Government were very close and it wanted to create a "Soviet Germany", while SPD and USPD wanted to push forward socialist ideas within a parliamentary system. This is partly a result of Lenin's idea to provoke a world revolution. This idea was especially famous in the 1920s when the Soviet Union supported the KPD in Germany to push forward the Marxist ideas. During the late 1920s it lost many votes to the anti-democratic party from the right and the left: the KPD and the NSDAP (National-Socialist German Workers Party) due to the economic crisis of 1929. It is another example of how radicalism was becoming more and more powerful.

As it is visible in the diagram during the late 1920s and the early 1930s it has become more difficult to form a government because the centrist, centre-left and centre-right parties lost a lot of their voters and the extremist parties on the right and on the left increased their share of votes. This led to a very destabilised political situation.
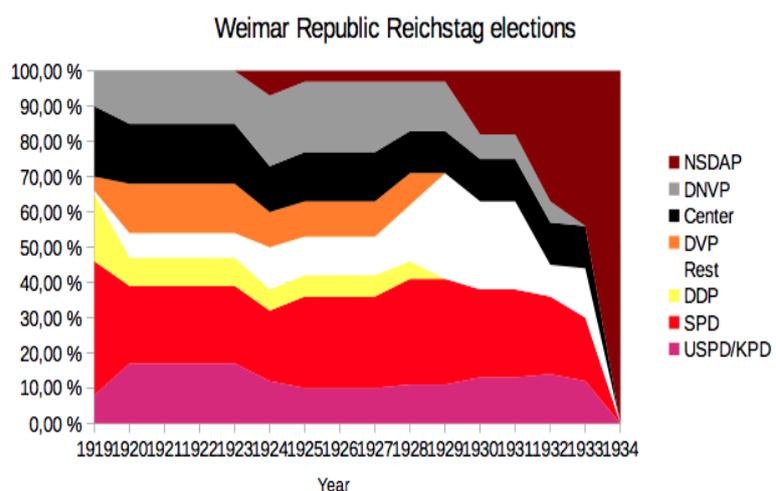
18 creative commons

In Spain what succeeded was right-wing radicalism. In 1924 Catalonia's Captain General Miguel Primo de Rivera staged a coup and banned the Communist Party, which suffered repression until the proclamation of the Second Republic in 1931.

---

[18] http://thesocialsciencepost.com/es/2015/09/los-intelectuales-espanoles-ante-la-urss-i/

In Ireland communist ideas didn´t have so much impact until the end of the War of Independence (1919-1921), when the first Communist Party of Ireland (CPI) was founded. The war ended with the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty, which left six counties in Ireland under British control. It was a controversial move which led to the Irish Civil War (1922-23) between the pro-Treaty and anti-Treaty sides of the IRA.

The CPI was the first Irish political party to oppose the Anglo-Irish Treaty between the IRA and the British State. The Treaty divided the Irish Republican Army and led to the Civil War of 1922-23. The element of class conflict in the civil war is undeniable. The anti-Treaty side was popular in poorer rural areas, while the pro-Treaty side was associated with the wealthier class of landed Anglo-Irish Protestants.

The CPI was active in the civil war, although it was dissolved in 1927. In May 1922 the Rotunda in Dublin was seized and the Red Flag was hoisted, but held for only a few days.[19] Finally, the anti-Treaty side was defeated in the Civil War. After this the anti-Treaty IRA grew more pro-Soviet. In 1925 a delegation had been sent to the Soviet Union to meet with Stalin, where the IRA agreed to pass information on the US and UK to the Soviets in exchange for finance and weaponry. The espionage arrangement continued until 1930.

The 30s were the previous period to the Second World War, and therefore we have to focus on the rising of fascist movement and their consequences. Besides, in 1929 had started the economic crisis.

After the German elections of 1933, the NSDAP (National-Socialist German Workers Party) won most of the seats and only the SPD voted against the Enabling Act of 1933 (Ermächtigungsgesetz).

Therefore, the Nazi era started and both SPD and KPD were banned and their members and leading politicians had to fear persecution. Some former SPD members were involved in planning the 20 July plot where they tried to assassinate Hitler.

This rise of fascism contributed to a red scare in Ireland. In October 1931 12 socialist organisations were declared illegal, including the Revolutionary Workers' Groups, although they were legalised in 1932.

The Catholic Church used its anti-communist influence to prevent printers from printing socialist and communist newspapers.In June 1933 a new Communist Party of Ireland was established in a highly anti-communist political atmosphere, and the IRA was forbidden in 1935.

Nevertheless, during the 1930s IRA membership had increased so much as a result of the growth of radical movements due to the Great Depression. The Republican Congress was formed in 1934 by pro-communist republicans who left the IRA when the organisation turned

---

[19] http://www.communistpartyofireland.ie/cogadh.html

against communism. This was a Marxist-Leninist group committed to establishing a workers' republic in Ireland. However, internal disagreements within the group meant that it failed to effect real change or gain influence.

In contrast, in 1931 the Second Spanish Republic was established. It had a Constitution which recognized many rights, and they sometimes tried to copy somehow the Russians: agrarian reform, no religion, vote for women… There was a rising of left-wing parties (communist, socialist and anarchist), but this actually produced a right-wing rising too (fascists parties, catholics, monarchists...).

That division would produce the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), and soon the communists became one the most important and organized forces in the resistance of fascism. However, there were also struggles between different communist tendencies (Stalinist, Trotskyist, etc). An important witness was George Orwell, who explain in his book "Homage to Catalonia" his personal experience related. He had to escape from the Communist purges in Barcelona in June 1937 against people who opposed the Moscow line[20]. This was, actually, one of the main consequences of the influence of the Soviet Union. It helped the Republican side of the war, and in exchange it received Spanish gold[21], not without controversy.

An important aspect of the relations between Spain and other left-wing associations from different parts of the world was the creation on the International Brigades. They were paramilitary units organised by the Communist International to assist the Republican's government during the Spanish Civil War. Those volunteers were from all over Europe and America: from the USA, France, Germany, Ireland, England[22], Poland, South America, etc. You can see below a Capa's photograph of the International Brigades' Farewell.[23]

After the end of the war started General Franco's dictatorship, which did not end until 1975. Some children were evacuated to countries such as France or the Soviet Union. All the left-wing parties were banned, and their members suffered for repression. Many of them went to exile, and some fought in the Second World War supporting the Allies.

---

[20] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Homage_to_Catalonia

[21] Garrido Caballero, Magdalena. 'Las Relaciones Entre España Y La Rusia Soviética Durante La II República. *Las Relaciones Entre España Y La Unión Soviética a Través de Las Asociaciones de Amistad En El Siglo XX*. Universidad de Murcia, 2006.

[22] http://www.international-brigades.org.uk/

[23] https://www.ecestaticos.com/imagestatic/clipping/45d/5ad/45d5ad0863ff7b299395ab2d895d1e08/moradiellos-ni-la-guerra-empezo-en-el-34-ni-la-republica-fue-una-dictadura-comunista.jpg?mtime=1468508806

AFTER THE SECOND WORLD WAR

War or peace? How to get used to the new reality?

The period after the Second World World was one of the stormiest times of European history. The differences in political system of Alliance's and fascists' sides leaded to many important events that have changed the future of our continent and made Europe the place that we see today.

After the defeat of Germany in World War II many parties did not hesitate to try to establish Democratic Party policy again. Nine parties were established in the country which means that the parliament was characterized by fragmentation. Many see parallels to the split-up Reichstag of the Weimar Republic. Especially the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) tried to continue their success from the Weimar Republic after the war. Already in June 1945 the SPD addressed the German working class in the matter of reconstructing a democratic state system:
"Demokratie in Staat und Gemeinde, Sozialismus in Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft" - *"democracy in state and commune, socialism in economy and society."*

The SPD was clearly against separatism and strong federalism in Germany until the establishment of the new constitution in 1949. Important to know is that the Social Democrats were still dedicated to social worker's policy and clearly in favor of social equality and justice but after the so-called Godesberger Program of 1959 the party finally distanced itself from marxist ideas. In the course of this, they advocated for market economy, a compromise between centrally planned economy and free market economy (but with more focus on free market economy) where the state has regulating competences. After a referendum of the parties KPD and SPD in Berlin on the question of unification of the two left-wing parties the SPD stated to *"successfully have prevented the unification with the Russian oriented communists"* (*"Die Vereinigung mit den russisch orientierten Kommunisten erfolgreich verweigert"*).

Both Poland and Spain could not try to improve their economic situation and political system as Germany was going to do it. Owing of loss and a difficult country's condition, Polish and Spanish citizens were able to subordinate to the regime. There was a proponent of Hitler and Mussolini in Spain – Franco, follower of Catholic Church, conservatism and monarchy and opponent of the communist system. Resistance against Franco's dictatorship was especially organized by the Communist Party, because they still had leaders and resources. There was a movement called the "Maquis". They were a guerrilla army who continued to fight against the Spanish State until the early 1960s, carrying out sabotage and robberies. However, they didn't have much impact. After the end of the Second World War they realized that the Allies weren't going to fight against Franco.

There was a similar situation in Poland, but it came in the opposite direction. Because of the Red Army's Liberation in Poland, this country become a central place of deep

communism. Despite people's resistance, Stalin made Poland a place of crimes and pain. Warsaw Uprising has "bleeded" because Red Army hasn't reacted on asking for help. Many Commanders and members of Home Army (illegal army in Poland) were arrested and killed. Now in Poland they are called 'cursed soldiers'. The most known in Poland: General Fieldorf, who was active in resistance movement against Russian Occupation, killed in 1953 and Captain Witold Pilecki who came to Auschwitz Camp by himself to get some information for Polish Home Army and to organize the escape of some prisoners. He was killed in 1948.

The main goals of Soviet Communism in Poland were equality, benefits of hard working and submission of the society. As opponents of religious lifestyle, communists used to close Polish churches.

Totally different situation took place in Germany, where conservative parties like Christian Democratic Union (CDU/CSU) represented the catholic/Christian majority of the German people and also of political importance was the smaller coalition partner Liberal Democrats (FDP). Nevertheless, the KPD was rebuilt in 1945 (after massive persecution during the Nazi times) with intense dedication for the fight against fascism, engagement for the self-organization of factories which deal with common property and public means, the expropriation of the aristocracy and the establishment of democratic standards. Furthermore they wanted to tackle hunger and unemployment in Germany.

Unfortunately, Spain didn't escape a sad communist reality. In 1975 General Franco died and his dictatorship died too. Spanish Communist Party came to power and created a Constitution two years later. The party tended to Eurocommunism, and it "betrayed" some of its principles: they accepted a monarchy; they accepted a non-lay state (although it is not confessional). That support strengthened the new democracy, it was mainly a symbolic importance. In 1982 the socialist Spanish party (PSOE) won the elections after a failed coup, so the president was a socialist. The Communist Party also had deputies in the Parliament, one of them was Dolores Ibárruri.

How to live in communist reality? Ask Poles! Because of catastrophic destructions, Stalin orders to rebuild ruins of Warsaw for Poles' money. Every Polish adult person is paying 0,5% of present salaries. Social Foundation of the Capital City Rebuilding.

There were new communist parties in Poland: National Council of Poland and National Committee of the Liberation which came to power after the II World War. Every people were forced to hard working.

Children had special lessons at their schools that concern fighting skills, even using weapon. Topics of essays on Polish exams were connected with Russian Propaganda: "Role of 1st May Demonstrations in communist and capitalist system", "Warsaw – pride of PRL", "Exam of mature citizen" and more. Many of primary school teachers were not well educated. The most important knowledge concerned propaganda and Russian Ideology. People are forced to take part in marches and to celebrate holidays like 1 of May (Labour

Day). Many of primary school teachers were not well educated. The most important knowledge concerned propaganda and Russian Ideology. There are so many pictures that show the Socialists' encouragement for polish people to work. The important fact was raising the women's role. More and more popular catchword: "Girls, let's drive tractors".

The thing that Poles remember probably the most precisely are long queues. Many of them had to start their waiting over three or four hours before shop's open. Moreover, usually all you could buy was… a bottle of vinegar. The dream of polish children was to get a bar of chocolate or a few oranges for Christmas, for parents – to buy some bread for their family and for women – pack of tights (color in not important). To buy something, you needed special document that let you get some number of products.

We can find a different country, whose issue has changed after the Second World War. That's Ireland. In the 60s the IRA again came under left-wing leadership, and the organisation moved towards a class-based analysis of the situation in Northern Ireland. This led to a split in 1969 between the Official IRA, which took a Marxist view of the struggle and argued that strife between the working classes furthered the interests of capital, and the Provisional IRA, which continued a campaign of violence.

Taking everything into consideration, we can say that there are many differences and similarities in political systems after the Second World War at the area of whole Europe despite taking part in the same terrible events of 1939-1945. We should appreciate our past, the fact that as people we were in the same situation. The situation of pain, the moments when our life was a challenge. We ought to respect the mistakes that not only our society made in previous. We have to try improve standards of our life and make Europe better and better.

End of the Cold War

What's next… or Who's next?

The end of the cold war marked the beginning of a new period in Europe. The Communist regimes in Eastern Europe began to fall apart but still left-wing political parties shaped that period where Europe finally grew together overcoming hostilities between the East and the West. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in some former communist countries many people still sticked to this ideology and found difficulties in adapting to the capitalist western system.

Poland was one of the first countries where the people started to revolt against the communist regime.

From the 1950s to the 1980s there were many strikes and protests of workers against the communist regime. Some of them ended in a bloodbath, where many innocent people

died. A lot of them were young, like Janek Wisniewski, about whom a popular polish song was created: "Janek Wisniewski padl" ("Janek Wisniewski has been killed"). This song moved many people and it became a symbol of the Polish struggle for freedom from communism.

On the 13th of December 1981, Communist Government in Poland declared the martial law. The army went out on the streets, tanks were seen everywhere around Krakow's main square. There was a curfew and life in Poland became a challenge. There is a very popular photo symbolising the people's feelings at that time (http://histografy.pl/czas-apokalipsy/). There is a tank visible in the foreground, but in the background there is a famous cinema announcing the premiere of the film "Czas Apokalipsy" ("Time of Apocalypse"). Thus, the people of Poland could identify with that photo.

During the time of February to April of 1989, Communists and the Opposition, which was headed by Lech Walesa (Polish Nobel Prize Winner and later president of Poland) started a the "Round Table", a discussion group between the main opposition groups and the communist government.
The "Round Table" led to organizing first free election, after which Lech Walesa became the president of Poland. That event was the definitive end of Communism in Poland.

During the collapse of Communist Regimes all over Eastern Europe the East German government was overthrown by the population as well. After the first free and democratic elections in East Germany in 1990 a conservative coalition came to power. They set the course for the reunification of Germany in October 1990.
The former ruling party of East Germany (SED) turned into the so-called PDS (party of democratic socialism) which in 2007 merged with the WASG ("Arbeit & soziale Gerechtigkeit - Die Wahlalternative") the left-wing party "die Linke" (the left).

In Spain, being much less affected by the end of the cold war, during the beginning of the 1980s the Communist Party almost disappeared due to its internal problems.The Socialist Party (PSOE) however, being one of the two major political parties in Spain, won the elections of 1982, 1986, 1989, 1993, 2004 and 2008.
In 1986 the Communist Party supported the creation of the United Left (IU), which was a coalition of several parties like the Communist or Republican Left (IR, created in 1977). This newly created party then grew again and got a voter share of about 10 % during the 1920s.

Nowadays

Are Communists around us? Are they in your own country?

Nowadays, in many western European countries there has been a new rise of left-wing parties. However, in the East of Europe the memory of communism is still present and left wing parties face more challenges there.

For example in Poland there are three communist parties active today that also used to play an important role in Polish politics in the past: SLD and KPP which are not represented in the parliament but still function today and the PSL, which is still represented in the parliament. However, none of these parties plays a crucial role in Polish politics.
The existence of communist parties in Poland is legal but they can't share totalitarian ideology. If they did it, they would be banned.

In Spain however, there has been the rise of new left-wing movements. 2014 the new party "Podemos" ("We Can") was created. Many of its leaders had been in Communist parties or associations before, so "Podemos" represents a mix of communist, socialist, extreme left and social democratic ideas. They are really important in Spain right now as a rising party with a growing influence on the Spanish society.

The older "United Left" continued working until today. However, it does not play an important role in the Spanish political system, but it is still a symbol of the old Spanish left-wing   ideology.
The Socialist Party (PSOE) is one of the largest parties in Spain. As of 2017 they are in the opposition, but the last time they won the elections was in 2008. There are also many more extreme left-wing parties in Spain, some of them only regional parties. For instance, the parties that play a crucial role these days are the Catalonian parties: The "Republican Left of Catalonia" (ERC, "Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya"), which is a socialist party and one of the major supporters of the independence of Catalonia; as well as the "Popular Unity Candidacy" (CUP), which is a pro-independence and anti-capitalist party.

"Die Linke" in Germany, similar to "Podemos" in Spain, publicly criticises capitalism proclaiming that real democracy is only possible in a socialist system; also public goods should be in the hands of the people and economy should be guided by the state. Pacifism is a main point of the left-wing ideas of the party. Even though "Die Linke" is clearly distancing its party ideology from any socialist hegemonies with regard to historic socialist state's examples but a definite alienation from the socialist regime of the GDR by calling it an illegitimate state is not being published until now. Many critics think "Die Linke" tries to moralise communism. This might also explain the soothing position "Die Linke" took when Russia annexed Crimea in 2014. Since 1990 "Die Linke" has nearly always been represented in the parliament and in 2017 reached the best result ever since the fusion with PDS. "Die Linke" still has a large part of their voters based in the former GDR until today.

The SPD is still the second-largest party in Germany, even though it lost large parts of their voters in the last decades, now accounting for only around 20 % of the votes.

Since 1994 the Green party has also been constantly represented in the parliament (first time already in 1983 with 5,6% as a belated result of the student's movement).

There are still some communist and marxist parties existing in Germany, for example the Marxist-Leninist Party of Germany (MLPD). With loads of advertisement the MLPD spread their left-wing ideas using Lenin's image on posters during the last elections of 2017.

Photo by Andrij Portnov

The Workers' Party of Ireland, a Marxist-Leninist party, was founded in 1970. This group had split from Sinn Fein at the start of the Troubles in Northern Ireland, taking a Marxist view of the conflict.[24] The Workers' Party was associated with Official Sinn Fein, which had adopted the slogan "Peace, Democracy, Class Politics" in an echo of Lenin's "Peace, Bread, Land". It supported the USSR and other communist and socialist organisations in Europe. The party remained small. It was most successful in the 1989 general election, in which it won 7 seats in the Dail, the Irish Parliament. After the fall of communism in Europe, the party split over whether to maintain their Marxist position in the more anti-communist atmosphere. Although the party remains active they have not had representatives in parliament since 1992.

As the power of the Catholic Church in Ireland has declined, Irish politics have slowly become less conservative. In recent years there has been a rise in the number of left wing parties, with the formation of the "Social Democrats" and "Solidarity – People Before Profit" in 2015. Despite this politics remain dominated by the two major centre-right parties.

---

[24] *The Lost Revolution: The Story of the Official IRA and the Workers' Party*, Brian Hanley and Scott Millar, ISBN 1-84488-120-2

All in all...

To conclude we can say that the Russian Revolution was definitely a turning point for the left-wing movements all over Europe. Marxist ideas that have been present in Europe before, were now implemented in Russia. The Russian Revolution provided an example of a communist society and inspired leftists across the world. In many countries left-wing groups were formed to fight for the rights of workers, the rights of nationalities, the rights of women and to establish a fairer society. The primary result of the Revolution was the establishment of the USSR, which had a huge influence not only on Central and Eastern European countries but also all over the world. In some places it allowed very important thing achievements to be made: the emancipation of women, creation of trade unions. Nevertheless, it also brought terror and repression: violence, violation of human rights and prosecutions. It depends in the different context of each country, but in some places it would take many years until people could be free and have democratic elections and organisations.

All these dramatic and controversial events led to a polarisation in many European societies which produced struggles even between families. We still have to work for a united Europe that accepts its past and looks for a common future.