

The Socialists

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URL: http://www.cvce.eu/obj/the_socialists-en-7dc2bffe-54d6-484c-a42b-ff49ec79c346.html

Last updated: 08/07/2016



The Socialists

In general terms, the Socialists emerged from the Second World War in a stronger position than before. Many of them had denounced the rise of Fascism before the war and large numbers of them had joined the ranks of the resistance.

In Northern Europe, the social-democratic or workers' parties played a dominant political role. Immediately after the war, they occupied important government positions and maintained close links with the labour unions. They developed the concept of the Welfare State, which the British Government attempted to implement from 1945.

In Western and Southern Europe, particularly Italy and France, the Socialist Parties nevertheless had to face up to serious competition from the Left in the form of the Communist Parties. The Cold War continued to fuel the struggle for influence between the two workers' parties. The Socialists actually had great difficulty, in the face of continuous attacks by the Communists, in defending the austerity policy required by post-war economic constraints.

In Germany, in the Soviet zone of occupation, the Social Democratic Party (SPD) merged with the Communist Party (KPD) on 22 April 1946 to form the Socialist Unity Party (SED), whereas the SPD in the Western zones of occupation had refused any merger with the KPD. In most of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe under Soviet influence, the Socialist Parties were forced to abandon their independence and become a 'united workers' party' under Communist Party control.