

3.3 Socialism and Communism

Socialist views.

Aspect: Concepts of political Socialism.

This unit covers the specification elements related to “concepts of political socialism”. It is designed to provide a background to the topic but is not inclusive of all potential material required for examination purposes. It concentrates on both the knowledge and analytical skills required for A2. It does not seek to prepare students directly in the skills and processes required for answering the end of year examinations.

Both teachers and students will also need to undertake their own research/reading in order to provide a fully comprehensive coverage “Concepts of political Socialism”. This additional research is especially important in updating current material on the topic, which was not known or available when this unit was prepared.

It is important that teachers read through this unit and explore the exercises prior to commencing it. The unit can therefore be shaped best to the timings of the teacher and class concerned.

Aims and objectives

Aim:

The critical analysis of the concepts of political Socialism.

Objectives:

1. To examine the key socialist concepts.
2. To illustrate the theoretical foundations of political socialism.
3. To determine why certain ideas are so important to socialist.
4. To identify areas of tension between revolutionary and parliamentary socialism.

WJEC Government and Politics Assessment Objectives

The following WJEC learning objectives areas are addressed:

A01 – The conceptual basis of socialism.

A02 - The similarities, differences and connections between socialism and other ideologies concerning particular concepts; the similarities, differences and connections amongst socialists concerning particular concepts.

A03 - To seek to order the importance of central reasons and arguments with respect to determining the importance of particular concepts to political socialism.

Further guidance

The session commences with a general introduction.

The teacher should let the students know that this study session provides an introduction to the theoretical basis of political socialism.

The teacher should introduce the session by asking 'what beliefs do the following politicians have in common? – Jeremy Corbyn, Tony Blair, Clement Atlee, Richard Henry Tawney, Vladimir Ilich Lenin and Karl Marx.' This could be done gradually, introducing each individual at a time. The teacher should then ask 'what beliefs do the same politicians not have in common?'

Conclusion

Session concludes by teacher reminding the students that labels like revolutionary socialists, evolutionary socialists and gradualists, revisionists, Marxists, neo-Marxists, communists and social democrats are groupings that we put on individuals. While this may help us to understand and organise such thinking it may not be the case that those individuals would recognise themselves adhering to these categories. It is quite legitimate for other analysts to come up with different labels for such categories.

Exercise 1: Concepts of political socialism



Guidance

Students don't have to do all the terms in one go. Students can be allotted a certain group of terms to complete, for instance half the class could do the first eight terms while the other half do the last nine. Students should undertake this exercise individually and then in pairs. They should then agree on an answer before feeding back to the whole class.

The teacher should also let the students know that by matching the terms and definitions they are undertaking WJEC Assessment Objective AO1 – *Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of relevant institutions, processes, political concepts, theories and issues.*

The activity can be completed on a computer or tablet or on the printable worksheet included. It can also be returned to as a revision exercise.



Activity – Concepts of political socialism - key terms and definitions

[Click to open activity](#)

[See Worksheet 1](#)

Students should match the key terms and definitions.

Key Term	Definition
Class	A separation within society caused by social or economic features.
Bourgeoisie	A Marxist expression meaning the ruling class of a capitalist society.
Proletariat	A Marxist expression meaning a class that survives through the sale of its own labour.
Society	Socialists have regarded all human abilities and qualities to be determined by society.
Equality	Socialists have viewed social equality, or equality of outcome, in absolute or relative terms.
Egalitarianism	A belief in the primacy of equality as a political value.

Marxism	A belief that was created by summarising Karl Marx's views and beliefs into an organised and all-inclusive ideology.
Historical materialism	A Marxist expression meaning that economic conditions construct the political and legal system, culture, art and religion of a society.
Dialectic	A Marxist expression meaning that historical change is due to a conflict between two opposing forces that leads to a more developed stage.
Alienation	To become isolated or separated from one's true nature.
Surplus value	A Marxist expression meaning the excess of value created by the work of the proletariat over the wages they are paid.
Revolutionary socialism	A belief that socialism can only be achieved through the violent upheaval of the current political system.
Social revolution	Not merely a transformation of the existing political system, but a far wider reaching change in the economic conditions of society.
Bourgeois state	A Marxist expression meaning a political institution that acts in order to protect the interests of the ruling class.
Parliamentary socialism	A belief that socialism can be achieved by using the institutions of liberal democracies.
Gradualism	A belief that socialism does not have to be created through a sudden revolution but through measured improvements to society taken step by step.
Eurocommunism	A belief that Marxism could be combined with liberal democratic values.



Notes

These terms, although not an exclusive list, are crucial to an understanding of socialism and communism. Students must start to familiarise themselves with them. It is not enough to understand and know these concepts but students will be expected to use them.

Extension tasks can focus on sorting these terms into several categories:

- Concepts and types of socialism
- Concepts connected to revolutionary socialism – parliamentary socialism – both
- Concepts and beliefs connected to economics, politics, military or ethics

Teachers may wish to start highlighting divisions between revolutionary socialism and parliamentary socialism. Likewise, teachers may wish to introduce the debate about capitalism's central role in creating tensions amongst socialists and communists.

Exercise 2: Class



Guidance

Students should undertake this exercise individually and then in pairs. They should then agree on an answer before feeding back to the whole class. During feedback students should be asked to expand their answer by explaining why the key words deserve to be in that particular column.

The teacher should also let the students know that by matching the key words to the correct column they are undertaking WJEC Assessment Objective AO1 – *Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of relevant institutions, processes, political concepts, theories and issues.*

The activity can be completed on a computer or tablet or on the printable worksheet included.



Activity – Class - Column sorting

[Click to open activity](#)

See Worksheet 2

Students should match the key words to the appropriate column heading.

Marxist	Social democrat
Class is defined in relation to economic power. The Bourgeoisie The Proletariat Irreconcilable conflict	Class is defined in terms of income and status. 'White collar' 'Blue collar' Social improvement



Notes

The teacher should make the students aware that class is the most significant social division for socialists and communists. Socialist analysis of class development is used to explain why history has changed the way it has, and it will be social and economic forces that will explain how society is going to develop in the future. However, socialists and communists have disagreed about the qualities and significance of class.

The connection between socialism and class has undergone further alteration with the demise of the industrial working class in the west. This has led socialist parties to review their strategies to appeal to middle-class voters, but also to reach out to feminists, environmentalists and peace campaigners.

The teacher should also let the students know that by discussing similarities and differences Marxists and social democrats they are undertaking WJEC Assessment Objective AO2 – *Interpret and apply political information to identify and explain relevant similarities, differences and connections*.

The teacher should explain that they are doing this by categorising the factors. This makes the student familiar with the higher level demands of the WJEC specification.

Extension tasks can focus on developing writing skills:

Opening sentences of paragraphs can be suggested

Connectives can be proposed

Connections between paragraphs can be offered.

Exercise 3: Society



Guidance

Students should undertake this exercise individually and then in pairs. They should then agree on an answer before feeding back to the whole class. During feedback students should be asked to correct the false statements.

The teacher should also let the students know that by identifying the true and false statements they are undertaking WJEC Assessment Objective AO1 – *Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of relevant institutions, processes, political concepts, theories and issues.*

The activity can be completed on a computer or tablet or on the printable worksheet included.



Activity – Society - true or false

[Click to open activity](#)

See Worksheet 3

Students note whether the statements regarding society are true or false.

	True	False
The individual alone cannot overcome social and economic problems. The community is best placed to achieve social economic goals.	X	
This is an individualistic approach where the individual is set to strive for egoistical self-regard.		X
The ties of sympathy and common humanity are articulated through the belief of fraternity.	X	
Human nature is not static or unchanging, rather it is plastic, created by the influences and conditions of society.	X	
If asked to choose an answer to the question – What dictates human behaviour: nature or nurture? Socialists would answer – nature.		X
Socialists would agree with liberals that there is a distinct division between the 'individual' and 'society' and reject the notion that the 'individual' and 'society' are intrinsically connected.		X
As human beings are capable of creating their own nature, then they are capable of achieving true freedom and satisfaction.	X	



Notes

The teacher should make the class aware that socialism and communism are collectivist ideologies in that they believe that communal human effort is of greater practical value than individual self-regarding endeavour. Consequently it projects the idea that human nature is essentially social and infers that social groups like class are meaningful political units.

The teacher should also let the students know that by discussing differences between socialism and liberalism they are undertaking WJEC Assessment Objective AO2 – *Interpret and apply political information to identify and explain relevant similarities, differences and connections.*

The teacher should explain that they are doing this by identifying differences between competing conceptions of human nature. This makes the student familiar with the higher level demands of the WJEC specification.

Extension tasks can focus on the debate of nature v nurture. The teacher should also let the students know that by discussing the nature v nurture argument they are undertaking WJEC Assessment Objective AO3 - *Analyse and evaluate the areas of government and politics studied to construct arguments, make substantiated judgements and draw conclusions.*

Exercise 4: Justifications for equality



Guidance

Students should undertake this exercise individually and then in pairs. They should then agree on an answer before feeding back to the whole class. During feedback students should be asked to expand their answer by explaining why the key words deserve to be in that particular column.

The teacher should also let the students know that by identifying the different justifications they are undertaking WJEC Assessment Objective AO1 – *Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of relevant institutions, processes, political concepts, theories and issues.*

The activity can be completed on a computer or tablet or on the printable worksheet included.



Activity – Justifications for equality – sorting

[Click to open activity](#)

See Worksheet 4

Students place the statements in the correct column.

Fairness	Community and Cooperation	Need satisfaction
Inequality of wealth is not caused by the inequality of ability.	Equality of social circumstance promotes working together for the common benefit of the community.	In order for people to be free they require need-satisfaction.
Human inequality echoes the unequal arrangement of society.	Social inequality promotes conflict and instability within the community.	Essential needs such as food, water, shelter, relationships ... are basic to the human condition.
The most substantial practices of human inequality are formed by the unequal management of society.	Lack of equality of opportunity undermines cooperation and focuses on the 'survival of the fittest'.	'From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs.' Marx
Legal and political equality are insufficient because they ignore the structural inequalities of the capitalist system.		Since all people have very similar needs, wealth must be redistributed on the basis of need-satisfaction.
Equality of opportunity is a distraction as it legitimises the lie that is innate inequality.		Need-satisfaction may create inequalities by allowing for 'special needs' for those with disabilities.



Notes

The teacher should make the class aware that the defining feature of socialism and communism could be seen as a commitment to equality. It is equality that sets socialism and communism apart from all other ideologies.

Extension tasks can focus on debating which justification is the most significant or relevant to the 21st Century. The teacher should also let the students know that by discussing the significance and relevance of these justifications they are undertaking WJEC Assessment Objective AO3 - *Analyse and evaluate the areas of government and politics studied to construct arguments, make substantiated judgements and draw conclusions.*

The teacher should explain that they are doing this by categorising the justifications and making judgements on their significance. This makes the student familiar with the higher level demands of the WJEC specification.

Exercise 5: Types of socialism



Guidance

Students should then agree on definitions before feeding back to the whole class.

The teacher should also let the students know that by identifying different types of socialism they are undertaking WJEC Assessment Objective AO1 – *Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of relevant institutions, processes, political concepts, theories and issues.*

The activity can be completed on the printable worksheet included.



Activity – Types of socialism - note taking See Worksheet 5

Students read the extract from '*Political Ideologies – key themes (in summary)*' by Andrew Heywood and then write short notes identifying different types of socialism using the table in Worksheet 5.

The extract is from an article published by Andrew Heywood which can be accessed, from his website alongside many other articles at:

<https://andrewheywood.jimdo.com/articles/>

We are grateful to Andrew Heywood for allowing us to include the extract in this work.

Socialism

Socialism is an ideology that is defined by its opposition to capitalism and its attempt to provide a more humane and socially worthwhile alternative. The core of socialism is a vision of human beings as social creatures united by their common humanity; as the poet John Donne put it, 'No man is an Island entire of itself; every man is a piece of the Continent, a part of the main'. This highlights the degree to which individual identity is fashioned by social interaction and the membership of social groups and collective bodies. Socialists therefore prefer cooperation to competition, and favour collectivism over individualism. The central, and some would say defining, value of socialism is equality, socialism sometimes being portrayed as a form of egalitarianism. Socialists believe that a measure of social equality is the essential guarantee of social stability and cohesion, and that it promotes freedom in the sense that it satisfies material needs and provides the basis for personal development. The socialist movement has traditionally articulated the interests of the industrial working class, seen as systematically oppressed or structurally disadvantaged within the capitalist system. The goal of socialism is thus to reduce or abolish class divisions.

Socialism, however, contains a bewildering variety of divisions and rival traditions. Utopian socialism, or ethical socialism, advances an essentially moral critique of capitalism. In short, socialism is portrayed as morally superior to capitalism because human beings are ethical creatures, bound to one another by the ties of love, sympathy and compassion. Scientific socialism, undertakes a scientific analysis of historical and social development, which, in the form of Marxism, suggests not that socialism 'should' replace capitalism, but predicts that it inevitably 'would' replace capitalism. A second distinction is about the 'means' of achieving socialism, namely the difference between revolution and reform. Revolutionary socialism, most clearly reflected in the communist tradition, holds that socialism can only be introduced by the revolutionary overthrow of the existing political and social system, usually based upon the belief that the existing state structures are irredeemably linked to capitalism and the interests of the ruling class. Reformist socialism (sometimes termed evolutionary, parliamentary or democratic socialism), on the other hand, believes in 'socialism through the ballot box', and thus accepts basic liberal democratic principles such as consent, constitutionalism and party competition. Finally, there are profound divisions over the 'end' of socialism, that is, the nature of the socialist project. Fundamentalist socialism aims to abolish and replace the capitalist system, viewing socialism as qualitatively different from capitalism. Fundamentalist socialists, such as Marxists and communists, generally equate socialism with common ownership of some form. Revisionist socialism aims not to abolish capitalism but to reform it, looking to reach an accommodation between the efficiency of the market and the enduring moral vision of socialism. This is most clearly expressed in social democracy.

Types of socialism	
Utopian socialism	
Scientific socialism	
Revolutionary socialism	
Reformist socialism	
Fundamentalist socialism	
Revisionist socialism	



Notes

The teacher should make the class aware that labels such as utopian, scientific, revolutionary, reformist, fundamentalist and revisionist are used to help us understand socialism. Many socialists may dispute being labelled in a particular manner and other categories are prevalent. It is quite legitimate for analysts to use other terms to describe socialism.

Extension tasks can focus on finding similarities and differences between the different types of socialism. The teacher should also let the students know that by identifying the similarities and differences between strands of socialism they are undertaking WJEC Assessment Objective AO2 – *Interpret and apply political information to identify and explain relevant similarities, differences and connections.*

Exercise 6: Marx



Guidance

Students should undertake this exercise individually and then in pairs. They should then agree on an answer before feeding back to the whole class.

The teacher should also let the students know that by identifying aspects of Marxian thought they are undertaking WJEC Assessment Objective AO1 – *Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of relevant institutions, processes, political concepts, theories and issues.*

The activity can be completed on the printable worksheet included.



Activity – Marx - note taking

See Worksheet 6

Students to watch the video clip at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fSQgCy_ilcc&t=177s then make notes in the table on Worksheet 6.

Problems with capitalism	
Modern work is alienated	
Modern work is insecure	
Workers get paid little while capitalists get rich	
Capitalism is very unstable	
Capitalism is bad for capitalists	



Notes

The teacher should make the class aware that capitalism is the concept that divides socialists. The issue of capitalism has split socialists into those who seek to restructure capitalism and those like Marx who believe it is irredeemable. A socialist's attitude towards capitalism will define them as a revolutionary or a reformist.

Exercise 7: Strands within political socialism



Guidance

Students don't have to do all the strands in one go. Students can be allotted a certain strand to complete. Students should undertake this exercise individually and then in pairs. They should then agree on an answer before feeding back to the whole class. During feedback students should be asked to expand their answer by explaining why the key words deserve to be in that particular column.

The teacher should also let the students know that by matching the key words and columns they are undertaking WJEC Assessment Objective AO1 – *Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of relevant institutions, processes, political concepts, theories and issues.*

The activity can be completed on a computer or tablet or on the printable worksheet included.



Activity – Strands within political socialism - Matching the key word

[Click to open activity](#)

[See Worksheet 7](#)

Students should match the key words to the correct box on the matrix.

	Social Democracy	Communism
Human nature	Social justice Ethical socialism Christian socialism	Historical materialism Dialectic Frankfurt School
Revolution	Bernstein Gradualism Revisionism	Social revolution Dictatorship of the proletariat Democratic centralism
State	Welfare state Democratic state Market state	Bourgeois state Leninism Stalinism
Economy	Mixed economy Economic management Third way	Alienation Surplus value State socialism



Notes

The teacher should make the class aware that there may well be an argument for placing particular key words in more than one column. After completion of the task the teacher should then ask the students to select one set of key words from each column that would best represent that particular strand of socialism. Students should then be asked to explain their choices.

The teacher should also let the students know that by discussing the significance of these key words they are undertaking WJEC Assessment Objective AO3 - *Analyse and evaluate the areas of government and politics studied to construct arguments, make substantiated judgements and draw conclusions.*

The teacher should explain that they are doing this by discussing the significance of these key words. This makes the student familiar with the higher level demands of the WJEC specification.

Extension tasks can focus on making connections between strands of socialism by outlining similarities and differences. The teacher should also let the students know that by identifying the similarities and differences between strands of socialism they are undertaking WJEC Assessment Objective AO2 – *Interpret and apply political information to identify and explain relevant similarities, differences and connections.*