

Tensions within socialism

- **Human nature:** all socialists believe that human nature is malleable and improvable, 'plastic' not permanent. Yet some socialists, such as Marx, believe that human nature is especially susceptible to whichever economic system it lives under. Therefore, people are likely to suffer a 'false consciousness' that can be cured only by revolution and authoritarian rule (the dictatorship of the proletariat). Other socialists, including revisionists like Giddens, argue that human nature can prosper under capitalism yet still appreciate the importance of core socialist beliefs such as cooperation, fraternity and collectivism.
- **Society:** by definition, all socialists see our social environment (i.e. society) as the crucial determinant of our personalities. So if society can be improved (i.e. made more equal and fraternal), improvements in our attitude and behaviour will follow. Yet socialists disagree about whether society can be improved gradually. Revolutionary socialists, like Marx and the Frankfurt School, believe existing society is so 'sick' and so inimical to socialist values that only a revolution can provide the necessary 'shock therapy'. Other fundamentalist socialists, like Beatrice Webb, believe society can be 'gradually' improved, and socialist values gradually more entrenched, by a series of reforms that gradually curtail private ownership. Revisionists like Crosland and Giddens also argue that society can be gradually improved and believe such improvements can occur alongside private property and capitalism.

- **The state:** unlike collectivist anarchists, socialists believe a state is vital to the promotion of core socialist values. But they differ dramatically about what kind of state is needed. Marx and orthodox communists believed the existing capitalist state would have to be destroyed by revolution and replaced by a dictatorship of the proletariat, which, in turn, would 'wither away' to produce stateless communism. Democratic socialists like Webb and revisionists like Crosland and Giddens believed that the existing state can be used to steer society towards socialist values and that the traditional state (in capitalist society) requires constitutional reform rather than abolition.
- **The economy:** fundamentalist socialists (like Marx, Luxemburg and Webb) believe socialism is incompatible with a capitalist economy based on private property. Marxists and orthodox communists believe that a new, non-capitalist economy should be created quickly, via revolution, while democratic socialists believe such a non-capitalist economy will be created gradually, via a series of elected socialist governments. By definition, revisionists believe that socialism is possible within a capitalist economy. Social democrat revisionists like Crosland believe that the economy should be mixed (i.e. allowing a degree of public ownership) and run along Keynesian lines by governments. Third Way revisionists like Giddens believe the economy should be neo-liberal, privatised and deregulated, claiming this will produce a greater tax yield and thus more public spending.