

## 2.3 Socialism

### Introduction

Socialists traditionally place a greater emphasis on the importance of society as a whole rather than the specific needs of individuals. For socialists, individuals are social creatures who thrive in close proximity to others. As long as the society in which they live is supportive, they can live successfully and harmoniously, acting selflessly in the interests of all.

Socialists see capitalism and classical liberalism as damaging because they encourage individualism, selfishness and egoism. They create 'wants' and greed, while institutionalising inequality and the (sometimes even artificially perpetuated) scarcity of desired or necessary goods.

### The impact of capitalism from a socialist perspective

#### Human cost

Capitalism is exploitative. Workers are not rewarded for the full value of their labour and are often exposed to unacceptable levels of harm.

#### Human spirit

Capitalism encourages greed, jealousy and an unhealthy form of competition. It acts against co-operation and altruism.

#### Democracy

Democracy is illusory. It appears to offer real hope of change but merely acts to preserve the capitalist order through minor concessions and incentives.

#### Inequality

Capitalism entrenches inequality. Its main motivation is the accumulation of wealth and – given limited wealth – this ensures that there will always be losers as well as winners.

### Resources

Capitalism is wasteful of resources. Products are designed to fail or be superseded at a certain point (fail-rates and inbuilt redundancy). The desire for ever-cheaper raw materials and ever-cheaper energy sources encourages the destruction of natural environments. Capitalism acts against long-term environmental planning in favour of short-term profits.

### A socialist agenda

Socialists, therefore, have the desire to remould society rather than allowing it to evolve through interaction. Socialists favour: the redistribution of resources resulting in greater equality of outcome, an emphasis on co-operation and common goals rather than competition and individualism, state provision of education and welfare, and collective control of the means of production.

### Different strands of socialism

