3.7 Revolutionary Socialism and Social Democracy: Tensions Within the Tradition

EDEXCEL 9PL0 · about 60 minutes · Write-in edition

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

Answer ALL questions. Short answer questions may be brief and use bullet points where appropriate. For levels-marked questions write a structured response with developed analysis and evaluation as required. The final 30-mark essay requires a clear judgement.

1 Define socialism in the context of the debate between revolutionary socialists and social democrats, naming one shared core goal. Context: core ideas within the socialist tradition.

(Total for Question 1 is 2 marks)

2 State one way in which both revolutionary socialists and evolutionary socialists agree about the end goals of socialism. Context: shared commitments within the socialist tradition.

(Total for Question 2 is 3 marks)

3 State two criticisms revolutionary socialists make of social democracy. Context: critiques of reformism from a revolutionary perspective.

(Total for Question 3 is 4 marks)

4 Analyse the strengths and weaknesses of the revolutionary socialist claim that parliamentary reform cannot end exploitation. Context: theory applied to practical political questions.

(Total for Question 4 is 9 marks)

5 Evaluate the extent to which socialists disagree over how socialism should be achieved. Context: focus on the revolutionary versus evolutionary divide, including the Third Way, and the ground they nevertheless share. This is the end-of-pack essay.

(Total for Question 5 is 24 marks)

6 Distinguish between revolutionary and evolutionary socialist views of capitalism, focusing on their different diagnoses of capitalism and the means of achieving socialism. Context: core theoretical differences within 19th to 20th century socialist thought.

(Total for Question 6 is 10 marks)

7 Explain how the abolition of private ownership of the means of production would, according to revolutionary socialists, alter the relations of production. Context: consequences envisaged by revolutionary theory.

(Total for Question 7 is 6 marks)

Mark scheme · 3.7 Revolutionary Socialism and Social Democracy: Tensions Within the Tradition

Question 1

a concise definition that socialism is a political ideology favouring collective provision or control of key resources and greater economic equality	**B1**
identifies one shared core goal, e.g. reducing economic inequality or improving workers welfare	**B1**

Answer: Socialism is an ideology advocating collective provision or control of major resources and institutions to reduce economic inequality; a shared core goal is to increase social and economic equality, for example by protecting workers and providing universal welfare.

Question 2

identifies a shared goal, e.g. reduction of class inequality or improvement of workers rights	**B1**
brief development showing how both strands articulate the goal	**B1**
briefly notes a caveat that methods differ even when the end is similar	**B1**

Answer: Both strands commonly agree on goals such as reducing class inequality and improving workers rights and material security; both aim for a fairer distribution of wealth and expanded social rights, even though they disagree sharply about how to achieve these ends.

Question 3

identifies one accurate criticism, e.g. reformism accepts capitalism and so preserves its exploitative relations	**B1**
brief development of that criticism	**B1**
identifies a second accurate criticism, e.g. social democracy leads to co-option of labour movement and pacification of class struggle	**B1**
brief development of that criticism	**B1**

Answer: One criticism is that social democracy accepts and thereby legitimises capitalism, so it preserves underlying exploitative relations rather than ending them. A second criticism is that reformism tends to co-opt the labour movement and pacify class struggle, preventing the development of the radical consciousness revolutionary socialists deem necessary for genuine transformation.

Question 4

Level 0 No relevant content.	**0**
Level 1 Basic explanation of the claim or a simple criticism, with limited development.	**1-3**
Level 2 Clear explanation of both strengths and weaknesses, with some developed analysis and examples.	**4-6**
Level 3 Detailed, balanced analysis evaluating the theoretical force of the claim and its practical implications, considering historical or contemporary examples.	**7-9**

Indicative content:

- Strengths: revolutionary critique highlights structural features of capitalism such as ownership of production and surplus extraction that are not removed by redistribution, so reform can ameliorate but not abolish exploitation.
- Strengths: historical examples where reformist parties moderated demands when in office, suggesting co-option and limits to radical change via parliament.
- Weaknesses: parliamentary reforms have produced substantial improvements in living standards, labour rights and welfare that materially reduced exploitation and suffering, showing meaningful change via elections.
- Weaknesses: revolution can produce coercion, authoritarianism or economic collapse in practice, weakening the normative case for violent or extra-parliamentary methods.
- A strong answer weighs theoretical rigor against empirical evidence and reaches a judgement recognising that parliamentary reform can achieve significant progress but may not, on its own, abolish structural exploitation as defined by revolutionary theory.

Question 5

Level 0 No relevant content.	**0**
Level 1 Basic, limited knowledge of revolutionary and evolutionary positions with little or no developed analysis or evaluation. Assertions are generic and unsupported.	**1-6**
Level 2 Clear, mostly accurate knowledge of both strands with some analysis; evaluation is present but may be one-sided, or the argument may not fully relate to the precise question about the extent of disagreement.	**7-12**
Level 3 Detailed, accurate knowledge and developed analysis demonstrating understanding of differences and some shared ground; evaluation weighs strengths and weaknesses with reasoned judgement, though development may be uneven across AO1, AO2 and AO3.	**13-18**
Level 4 Sophisticated, wide-ranging and accurate knowledge applied to a sustained evaluation that directly addresses the extent of disagreement. Analysis integrates theory and relevant empirical examples, assesses the coherence and practicability of each route, recognises areas of agreement, and reaches a clear, balanced and well-substantiated judgement.	**19-24**

Indicative content:

- Exposition of the revolutionary position: capitalism is structurally exploitative, only removable by overthrow, abolition of private ownership of the means of production and social transformation beyond mere reform.
- Exposition of the evolutionary/social-democratic position: capitalism is reformable via parliamentary democracy, progressive taxation, nationalisation of select industries, welfare expansion and regulation to reduce exploitation and achieve social justice.
- Discussion of the Third Way: late twentieth century social democracy that accepted markets while focusing on social investment, activation policies and partnerships with business, illustrating further variation within evolutionary socialism.
- Arguments for deep disagreement: methods are fundamentally different, with revolutionaries rejecting parliamentary institutions and evolutionary socialists seeing elections and legislation as central; the end goals may be framed differently in practice, with revolutionaries seeking abolition of capitalist ownership and many social democrats accepting a mixed economy.
- Arguments for limited disagreement: both strands share core commitments to reducing inequality, securing social rights, and improving workers conditions; both often endorse public provision and regulation in practice, showing convergence on some policies even if ultimate theory differs.
- Evaluation of practicability: consider empirical evidence where parliamentary routes achieved major reforms (welfare state, labour rights) versus historical revolutions that sometimes produced authoritarian outcomes or economic dislocation; weigh moral and strategic arguments about legitimacy, consent and likely human cost.
- Consideration of hybrid pathways: examples where radical rhetoric coexisted with reformist strategies, or where social-democratic parties adopted transformative policies when empowered, suggesting the binary is sometimes porous.
- Judgement: a balanced conclusion might argue that socialists disagree significantly on the appropriate route to socialism, and this disagreement has real policy and ethical implications, but there is nonetheless substantial overlap in many practical aims and some policies, so the extent of disagreement is large at the level of method and ultimate institutional arrangements, yet more limited at the level of concrete social goals and many interim policies.

Question 6

Level 0 No relevant content. **0**

Level 1 Basic, limited statements about one or both positions with little development or comparison. **1-3**

Level 2 Clear identification of key differences, with some explanation of diagnosis and means, but limited development or examples. **4-6**

Level 3 Detailed, accurate comparison that explains how revolutionary and evolutionary socialists diagnose capitalism differently and how they propose different routes to socialism, with some use of examples or development. **7-10**

Indicative content:

- Revolutionary socialists view capitalism as structurally exploitative, driven by private ownership of the means of production and the extraction of surplus value from labour, leading to class antagonism that cannot be resolved within capitalism.
- Revolutionary socialists argue systemic change is required, typically via revolution, seizure of the means of production, abolition of private property in the means of production and the establishment of a classless, collectively owned economy.
- Evolutionary socialists and social democrats treat capitalism as reformable, a system that can be managed or modified through democratic and parliamentary means to reduce exploitation and expand equality.
- Evolutionary routes include progressive taxation, regulation, nationalisation of specific industries where necessary, extensive welfare provision and gradual redistribution implemented through elections and legislation rather than violent overthrow.
- Revolutionary strategy stresses the centrality of class consciousness and often rejects reliance on bourgeois parliamentary institutions, whereas evolutionary socialists place faith in electoral politics, trade unions, and incremental legislation to achieve socialist aims.
- A clear distinction can be drawn between the desired end states: revolutionaries often seek the abolition of capitalism and private ownership of production, while evolutionary socialists accept a mixed economy and seek to humanise or limit capitalism while securing social rights.

Question 7

identifies that abolition removes private control over capital and investment decisions	**B1**
identifies that surplus value extraction by capitalists would end, changing how value is distributed	**B1**
identifies that workplace relations would shift from employer-employee hierarchy to collective or democratic management	**B1**
provides development, e.g. planned allocation or cooperative ownership replaces market-driven investment	**B1**
provides further development or consequence, e.g. reduction in class distinctions based on ownership and income derived from capital	**B1**
explains a potential challenge, e.g. difficulties in coordination, incentive structures and technological management	**B1**

Answer: Abolishing private ownership would remove capitalist control over investment and the capacity to extract surplus value, shifting distribution away from returns to capital towards collective provisioning. Workplace relations would move from hierarchical employer-employee models to collective or democratically managed enterprises, and allocation could be through planning or cooperative markets. This would reduce class divisions rooted in ownership, though revolutionaries acknowledge challenges such as coordinating production, designing incentives and managing complex technological economies.