3.8 Socialist Thinkers: Karl Marx and Rosa Luxemburg

EDEXCEL 9PL0 · about 55 minutes · Write-in edition

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

Answer ALL questions. For levels-marked questions, write full sentences and develop a clear line of argument using accurate political knowledge and named thinkers. Allow about 55 minutes for this pack.

1 Define Marx's concept of 'surplus value' as it appears in Capital and how it relates to exploitation.

(Total for Question 1 is 2 marks)

2 State two major works by Karl Marx and give the commonly cited publication years for each work as used in A-level teaching.

(Total for Question 2 is 4 marks)

3 Give two similarities and two differences between Marx's and Luxemburg's views on the role of the working class in bringing about socialism, with brief explanation for each point.

(a) Similarity 1, with brief explanation. **(1)**

(b) Similarity 2, with brief explanation. **(1)**

(c) Difference 1, with brief explanation. **(2)**

(d) Difference 2, with brief explanation. **(2)**

(Total for Question 3 is 6 marks)

4 Evaluate the extent to which Karl Marx and Rosa Luxemburg agree on how revolution should occur, making well-supported use of both thinkers' ideas.

(Total for Question 4 is 24 marks)

5 Explain three ways in which Marx's theory of revolution differs from a simple prediction that the proletariat will always rise immediately once they become conscious of exploitation.

(Total for Question 5 is 6 marks)

6 Analyse two Marxist criticisms of capitalism, using Marx's concepts of surplus value, exploitation, alienation and class struggle where relevant.

(Total for Question 6 is 10 marks)

Mark scheme · 3.8 Socialist Thinkers: Karl Marx and Rosa Luxemburg

Question 1

defines surplus value as the difference between the value produced by labour and the wages paid to labour **B1**

links this to exploitation: capitalists appropriate surplus value as profit **B1**

Answer: Surplus value is the difference between the value produced by labour and the wages paid to labour; capitalists appropriate this surplus value as profit, which is the basis of exploitation.

Question 2

names one work, e.g. The Communist Manifesto **B1**

gives the correct year for that work, e.g. 1848 for The Communist Manifesto **B1**

names a second work, e.g. Capital (Das Kapital) **B1**

gives the correct year for that work, e.g. 1867 for the first volume of Capital (allow 'Capital volume I 1867'; a note that later volumes were published posthumously is not required and earns no further mark) **B1**

Answer: The Communist Manifesto, 1848; Capital, volume I, 1867 (with later volumes published posthumously).

Question 3

(a) one accurate similarity with brief explanation, e.g. both see proletariat as the agent of change **B1**

(a) Answer: Both see the proletariat as the fundamental agent of revolutionary change, because workers are the class directly exploited under capitalism.

(b) one accurate similarity with brief explanation, e.g. both reject capitalist solutions as inadequate **B1**

(b) Answer: Both reject the idea that capitalism can be reformed to meet the needs of the working class, arguing that deeper structural change is required.

(c) one accurate difference, e.g. Marx allowed for organisation and theory to play a role in developing class consciousness **B1**

(c) brief development, e.g. Marx emphasised scientific analysis and party organisation in some interpretations, whereas Luxemburg emphasised spontaneity **B1**

(c) Answer: Marx emphasised the development of class consciousness through economic and political struggle, and in many readings accepted organised parties as instruments of working-class action; Luxemburg emphasised spontaneity and mass strikes, warning against over-centralised party control.

(d) one accurate difference, e.g. Luxemburg explicitly criticised vanguardist tactics and centralised control **B1**

(d) brief development, e.g. Marx's texts have been read to allow for disciplined organisation to guide revolutions, which Luxemburg feared could ossify **B1**

(d) Answer: Luxemburg explicitly criticised vanguardism and centralised control as threats to mass democracy; Marx's work has been interpreted to permit disciplined organisation to direct revolutionary strategy, a possibility Luxemburg rejected or warned against.

Question 4

Level 0 No relevant content. **0**

Level 1 Basic, limited knowledge of Marx and/or Luxemburg with little or no developed analysis. Evaluation, if present, is weak or asserted without substantiation. **1-6**

Level 2 Clear knowledge of both thinkers and some developed analysis of their views on revolutionary method; evaluation is present but may be descriptive or one-sided. **7-12**

Level 3 Detailed knowledge of Marx and Luxemburg used to construct a sustained analysis comparing their views on revolution, with developed evaluation and some assessment of strengths and weaknesses of each position. **13-18**

Level 4 Sophisticated, precise knowledge and analysis that critically evaluates both thinkers, considers counterarguments and implications, uses well-chosen textual and historical examples, and reaches a clear, well-supported conclusion on the extent of their agreement. **19-24**

Indicative content:

- Agreement points: both regard the proletariat as the key social agent for overturning capitalism and both see revolution as the means to abolish private ownership of the means of production and end exploitation, drawing on Marx's historical materialism and Luxemburg's commitment to revolutionary transformation.
- Marx's position: analysis of capitalism's internal contradictions, surplus value and class struggle leads to a historical-materialist prediction that revolutionary conditions will arise, with an emphasis on the role of class consciousness and organised struggle; Marx wrote in the Communist Manifesto and Capital about the development of proletarian organisation and political action.
- Luxemburg's position: strong critique of gradualism and parliamentary reformism, emphasis on spontaneous mass action and the mass strike as the principal motor of revolutionary change, and a warning against authoritarian centralisation; she argued that active participation of the masses is essential for genuine socialism.
- Points of divergence: Luxemburg criticised Leninist vanguardism and centralised party control that she thought risked substituting party power for proletarian self-emancipation, while some Marxist interpretations allow for disciplined party leadership to cohere working-class action; Marx's own texts contain complexities and ambiguities about organisation that have allowed varied readings.
- Evaluation of strengths and weaknesses: Marx provides a structural, economic account that links objective conditions to revolutionary possibility, which helps explain why revolutions occur in certain contexts; Luxemburg emphasises agency and democratic legitimacy, addressing the risk that revolutions imposed from above become authoritarian, but her stress on spontaneity may underplay the need for sustained organisation and theory in hostile political environments.
- Consideration of historical evidence: reference to Marx's 19th-century European context and Luxemburg's experience in the German and Russian debates of the early 20th century, including her reactions to Bolshevik centralisation after 1917, can be used to assess the practical implications of each approach.
- Judgement: a balanced conclusion might argue they agree on the goal and on the centrality of the proletariat and mass action, but disagree over the relative roles of spontaneous mass activity versus organised leadership and on the dangers of centralisation; the extent of agreement is therefore significant at the level of ends and fundamental critique of capitalism, but contested in means and organisational strategy.

Question 5

identifies one corrective, e.g. Marx saw class consciousness as historically produced, not automatic	**B1**
develops that point, e.g. workers need to experience objective conditions and organisation that foster class awareness	**B1**
identifies a second corrective, e.g. Marx recognised the role of material and political conditions such as crises and state repression in determining timing	**B1**
develops that point, e.g. economic crises can sharpen contradictions making revolution more likely, but outcomes are contingent	**B1**
identifies an additional nuance, e.g. Marx allowed for the influence of ideology and superstructure in delaying or preventing revolt	**B1**
develops that nuance, e.g. ruling-class ideas and institutions can obscure exploitation and slow revolutionary development	**B1**

Answer: Marx did not claim that proletarian revolt happens automatically once workers grasp exploitation; class consciousness is historically produced through experience, organisation and political struggle, and revolution depends on material triggers such as severe economic crises and political conditions like state repression. Ruling-class ideology and institutions can delay or prevent revolt, so the timing and occurrence of revolution are contingent rather than immediate once exploitation is recognised.

Question 6

Level 1 Limited or generalised identification of Marxist criticisms with little linked explanation or development. **1-3**

Level 2 Clear identification of two Marxist criticisms with explanation, using relevant concepts but with limited development or application. **4-6**

Level 3 Detailed, developed analysis of two Marxist criticisms, integrating Marxist concepts such as surplus value, exploitation, alienation and class struggle and showing their significance for understanding capitalism. **7-10**

Indicative content:

- A criticism based on surplus value: capitalism systematically extracts surplus value from labour, producing profit for capitalists and leaving workers with wages insufficient to reflect the value they create; this explains persistent inequality and gives a structural reason for class conflict.
- A criticism based on exploitation: capitalist production relationships rely on the appropriation of workers' labour by owners of the means of production, so economic inequality is not accidental but built into the system and reproduced through wage labour.
- A criticism based on alienation: capitalist labour alienates workers from the product, the labour process, fellow workers and their own human potential, undermining human fulfilment and social cohesion.
- A criticism based on class struggle and crisis: capitalism generates antagonistic class relations and periodic crises of overproduction and falling profitability, which Marxists argue make capitalism unstable and prone to revolutionary change.
- Integration point: show how these criticisms interlock, for example surplus value creates exploitation which produces alienation and fuels class struggle, making capitalism both unjust and unstable.
- Application: use brief examples or hypothetical scenarios, such as workplace deskilling, precarious wages, or economic recessions, to illustrate how the abstract concepts map onto real capitalist dynamics.