Socialism emerged in reaction to the appalling poverty of the industrial working class and the lack of political freedom and representation.
Central Themes

The main central themes of Socialism are as follows

1. COMMUNITY
Socialism emphasises the primacy of the community rather than the individual. At its heart is the belief that human beings have the capacity for collective rather than individual action and that collective action has naturally more harmonious results than selfish individualism.

2. COOPERATION
If human beings are social animals then the most natural form of relationship between humans is one of cooperation. Competition denies and runs in the face of true human nature promoting aggression and selfishness.

3. EQUALITY
Society is held together by the traditional ties of family and community. Traditional forms of authority (for example the church) and a sense of duty (for example to one’s school, one’s family or one’s employer) are what bind society together. The institutions of society or co-dependent in the sense that they all rely on each other to sustain themselves.

4. THE SATISFACTION OF NEED
A great emphasis is placed on the importance of authority. Authority derives from social position and is necessary and beneficial for the society as a whole. Those in authority are assumed to know how best to use that authority. They will use their authority responsibly and provide discipline and leadership which is beneficial for the society as a whole and in using that authority. Those lower down the social order have a duty to accept the authority of those above them.

5. COMMON OWNERSHIP
The ownership and control of property as a key conservative value. With it comes self reliance, self respect and a value for the property of others. It also encourages respect for law and order.
Central Themes

COMMUNITY

Socialism emphasises the primacy of the community rather than the individual. At its heart is the belief that human beings have the capacity for collective rather than individual action and that collective action has naturally more harmonious results than selfish individualism.

Socialists have a resolute belief in the malleability of human nature. Human nature is generally positive and ill will or anti-social behaviour is the product of social and economic circumstance.

Indeed Robert Owen wrote of the absurdity or attributing praise or blame to individuals since everyone was a product of the circumstances they find themselves in. Thus greed and self interest are not natural at all they are engendered by a system that necessitates greed and self interest.

Further socialism jettisons the argument that there is any such entity as an atomised individual. Individuals are social beings and social actors. The community bears upon them and they bear back upon the community.

Selfish, acquisitive, materialistic or instrumental aggression are socially conditioned rather than natural. They emanate from a system organised both economically and socially to produce such behaviours.

Humans are encouraged to act in ways alien to their nature, but perhaps logical within the constraints of current economic, political and social forms of organisation.

An even more radical claim of socialism lies in what it believes to be the waste of human potential that arises from conflict instead of cooperation and egoism instead of altruism. Humans are best able to fulfil their potential where cooperation, selflessness and altruism reign over greed and individualism.

There have been numerous attempts to place this philosophy at the heart of communal living experiments. Utopian communities such as those pioneered by Robert Owen had limited success, communes less so. However Kibbutzim in Israel have been particularly successful forms of experiment in communal living.

COOPERATION

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The Russian anarchist Kropotkin argued that mutual aid had enabled the human species to survive. Motivation need not only come in the form of material incentives. Individuals can be motivated by social reward, reciprocation and moral incentives too.

Capitalism has many contradictions. Hard work is no guarantee of material reward. Material riches are no guarantor of contentment or of happiness. However a contribution to the common good is both a rational and moral choice which increases the wealth of human happiness.

Material incentives encourage wealth acquisition and gross disparities between people. Material wealth also encourages the exploitation and appropriation of resources. It may also involve the exploitation of human resources and may lead to conflict and war.

A differential allocation of resources and rewards is not disputed by most socialists. Equality of outcome is very difficult, if not impossible, to achieve. However differentials should not be extreme and the allocation of resources and wealth such be perceived as just.

Such a distribution is more likely in systems based on cooperation rather than competition.

As a result socialists have experimented with forms of economic activity based on cooperation and shared ownership rather than on competition and private ownership.
### SOCIALISM Summary

1. Arose out of the turmoil of the C17th and C18th. Edmund Burke was deeply hostile to the revolution in France and argued for tradition and continuity.

2. The major core themes and values that Conservatives hold dear are tradition, the imperfection of human nature, organic society, traditional authority and the importance of private property.

3. Authoritarian Conservatism favours strict adherence to the authority of the government and the state.

4. One nation Conservatism owes its origins to Disraeli. Out of pragmatism it was better for the overall stability of society that the better off recognised an obligation to the less well off.

5. Paternalistic conservatism is a feature of one nation conservatism. There is a fundamental belief in paternalistic conservatism that conservatives should embrace ‘that which works’

6. The Middle way - an approach with combines state intervention and ownership, welfare and economic planning with the free market.

7. Libertarianism is the view that each person has the right to live his life in any way he chooses so long as he respects the equal rights of others. The government has no right of interference in the freedom of choice of the individual.


9. Modern conservatism tends to ignore Gilmour’s maxim for travelling light. Conservative parties are increasingly ideological and much less pragmatic than their predecessors.

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The cooperative societies of the 19th Century were set up and run along principles of shared ownership. Credit unions offer banking facilities on a not for profit basis to poor sections of the community unable to obtain high street banking facilities. Any profits made are redistributed to the shareholders (i.e. the customers in the form of interest on their accounts or in the form of reduced interest repayments). In the 1970s experiments were taken by central government in the creation of industrial cooperatives such as for example the Meridian Project. Far from being a failed historical relic there are many worker self management enterprises flourishing today, most notably in Latin America.

Some of these attempts at cooperation based enterprise have been more successful than others.

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### EQUALITY

The commitment to quality is at the heart of socialism, yet there are many different forms of equality and many practical constraints on both achieving and maintaining equality.

Socialists with liberals hold a commitment to social and political equality. Liberals see equality in these spheres as a necessary precondition of equality of opportunity.

However this is where socialism and liberalism depart. Socialists also believe in economic equality. Liberalism views any attempt at economic equality as an unnecessary and perhaps even dangerous interference in individual liberty.

Liberals believe that economic differentials can be explained largely in terms of the uneven distribution of talents and efforts. Some individuals have more ability than others and some work harder than others. They do so because they are incentivised to do so mainly through the acquisition of material rewards.

Socialists however believe that economic differentials are fundamentally unjust. They do not reflect the distribution of talents and efforts – but rather inequitable social and economic arrangements which foster poverty existing side by side with great wealth. Such arrangements promote an unfair and unjust distribution of wealth and material resources.

One of the primary reasons for the perpetuation of economic inequality is the absence of real social and political equality. Whilst liberals essentially see the social and political spheres as centres of equality of opportunity socialists most definitely do not. Because of social inequalities individuals are unable to realise their true potential.

The birthright of some maximises and exaggerates their abilities and efforts whilst for others it acts to hamper the expression of abilities and efforts.

Marxists see inequality in what they believe to be purely objective class terms. One’s social class is determined objectively by one’s relations to the means of production. Ownership of private property and the means of production denotes membership of the bourgeoisie. The proletariat have no property and must therefore sell their labour to survive.
Central themes of socialism continued...

**Satisfaction of needs**

‘...from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs...’ Marx.

The egalitarianism at the heart of socialism is strongly informed by theories of the just distribution of resources and material rewards.

Socialist theories of justice however argue that the allocation of resources should be based upon need.

Needs are not the same as wants or preferences though ironically capitalism functions in part through the translation of desires into needs or what Marcuse called ‘false needs’.

Needs are exactly that...needs.

They are neither frivolous nor transitional. They are basic and fundamental to human existence. There is a moral imperative towards the satisfaction of human needs.

A need is a necessity. It demands satisfaction.

Wants are a matter of personal judgment in a particular social and cultural context. In a materialistic culture wants become more extravagant.

Needs based theories of social justice cut to the very centre of the human condition.

Rather than see re-distribution as a threat to freedom, socialists see it as a prerequisite to freedom. Without the satisfaction of basic needs and even of those higher needs of love, affection and stimulation humans are incapable of achieving their potential. Their freedom is negated.

Through addressing needs as the fundamental basis of human rights, need satisfaction actually enlarges freedom – it unleashes potential.

For socialists then vast wealth accumulation is obscene when basic needs such as health and hunger are not met for some others. Further it is immoral when sufficient resources exist but their allocation is grossly distorted.

There is a philosophical and moral presumption that is not shared by liberals or by conservatives. This is the presumption that the needs of one person constitute a moral imperative or obligation on another person to act, or at least to give consent to the appropriation of some of his property in order to satisfy the needs of others.

In order to achieve social equality and the equal distribution of the ‘fruits of industry’ it was therefore necessary to abolish private property.

Non revolutionary socialists such as those committed to the achievement of socialism through democracy and parliamentary means however take the view that greater redistribution of wealth is the key to a more equitable and socialist society.

The welfare state is an example of this creed in action as are higher taxes for the better off.

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Social Equality
Private property is for socialists the root cause of inequality. Private property refers to productive wealth, land or capital rather than small scale private ownership of property.

Socialists stand in contrast to liberals and conservatives who believe private property to be natural and desirable as the basis of freedom. For socialists property is unjust for a number of reasons:

Wealth is produced by collective endeavour not individual efforts

Property encourages materialism, thus denying the essence of human fulfilment

Property is also divisive and produces conflict between different groups
The right to property should therefore be balanced against the rights of the community.

Marx envisaged the ultimate abolition of private property, but did not set out how this could be achieved in practice. In the Soviet Union a process of collectivisation took place placing industries under state control and management.

This became known as the ‘command economy’. It was believed that such an economy would benefit from rational planning of output, targets and prices based on need not the ‘irrational’ pursuit of profit. The fruits of the planned economy would then benefit everyone.

However, in the context of the Soviet Union forced collectivisation was resisted resulting in the Stalinist purges of the 1930s. State control began to be equated with political repression. Although many in the west began to see some form of socialism as inevitable or even desirable, post war moves towards nationalisation were much more selective.

In 1945 Labour obtained a landslide majority of 146 in Parliament. Set against the context of the war, and of the hardships of the depression ridden 1930s, the Attlee government pledged to build ‘A ‘New Jerusalem’. In 1942 the Beveridge Report had identified 5 Giant Ills, which had stalked the 1930s: Poverty, Ignorance, Disease, Squalor and Want. The Welfare state, designed to care for citizens ‘from the cradle to the grave’ was introduced. The key planks of the post war consensus were laid in the first term of the Attlee government:

The perceived failure of nationalisation, which had critics from both the left and the right, has meant that those committed to socialism
have had to search for alternatives to state ownership or abandon opposition to private ownership.

Some socialists advocate small self-managing communities based on a model of shared ownership. This however seems idealistic in a dynamic, large scale, globalised economy.

**Paths To Socialism**

Socialism is a very diverse political creed encompassing many contradictory strands. Partly this has evolved out of competing definitions of socialism, for example concerning whether socialism is compatible with capitalism. Thus socialists differ about ends.

Socialists also differ about means – how should these ends be achieved? Two major strands, the revolutionary and the evolutionary can be identified.

**REVOLUTIONARY SOCIALISM**

Revolutionary socialism had a great deal of appeal for early socialists. Early industrialisation had caused great immiseration, grinding poverty and widespread unemployment. There was a widespread view that capitalism was a system of naked exploitation and oppression. The pressure for reform and the oppressive response by the authorities to such pressures, meant that the industrial working class had little room for legitimate political participation or influence.

This further increased the logic of revolution as the only solution to the problems of the working class.

There are also theoretical underpinnings for revolution as the only true path to socialism.

For Marxists, the state is ‘...but an executive committee for managing the affairs of the bourgeoisie...’ In other words the state is not a necessary evil or a nightwatchman, a neutral arbiter ensuring fair play. It is active in supporting the interests of capital. Thus, the bourgeois state must be overthrown.

For Marxists, the reforms of the 19th century such as the extension of the franchise and the legalisation of trade unions, only served to consolidate capitalism, entrench the bourgeois state and rob the working class of its revolutionary potential. Proudhon stated the “...universal suffrage is counter revolution...”

Further, according to Lenin, *The State & Revolution* 1917, “…the essence of bourgeois parliamentarianism is deciding every few years which member of the ruling class is to repress and crush the people through Parliament.” The personnel of the polity are drawn from a relatively privileged segment of society (Miliband) and the state has at its disposal both ideological and repressive means of control (Althusser). Governments in democracies, even nominally ‘socialist’ ones...
OLD LABOUR v NEW LABOUR

Old Labour

Nationalisation
income tax rises for the well-off
social spending
no private engagement in the public sector
party control over the manifesto
strong links with unions
reputation for economic mismanagement and inflation
a reputation for extremism
Adherence to Clause IV

New Labour

A reputation for strong economic management (At least until 2008)
public-private partnerships (PFI = private finance initiative in public services)
national minimum wage and the New Deal
tuition top-up fees
cuts in disability and single-parent benefits
constitutional reform
moderate public image
welfare with conditions
promotion of work through tax breaks
Abolition of Clause IV
The libertarian or "classical liberal" perspective is that individual well-being, prosperity, and social harmony are fostered by "as much liberty as possible" and "as little government as necessary."

These ideas lead to new questions: What's possible? What's necessary? What are the practical implications and the unsolved problems?


"The central idea of libertarianism is that people should be permitted to run their own lives as they wish."


Libertarianism is the view that each person has the right to live his life in any way he chooses so long as he respects the equal rights of others.

Libertarians defend each person’s right to life, liberty, and property-rights that people have naturally, before governments are created. In the libertarian view, all human relationships should be voluntary; the only actions that should be forbidden by law are those that involve the initiation of force against those who have not themselves used force."

Liberals favour government action to promote equality, whereas conservatives favour government action to promote order. Libertarians favour freedom and oppose government action to promote either equality or order.
From 1945 onwards paternalism was the dominant strand in conservative thinking. Authoritarian Conservatism of the type seen under Franco in Spain collapsed in the mid 1970s as democracy took hold. Conservatism had a long standing apprachement with welfarist forms of social democracy and the ‘long boom’ of the post war years seemed to confirm the ascendancy of ‘managed capitalism’. However, new right ideas began to gain currency in the latter half of the 1960s and influenced Heath’s first two years in office between 1970 and 1972.

The New Right

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Neo Liberalism

The Liberal aspects of new right thinking are drawn from classical rather than modern liberalism. Restates the case for a minimal but strong state. Government cannot butt help have a damaging effect on society, though of itself it remains necessary to constrain individuals from acting upon their, essentially wicked, impulses.

The state is therefore necessary solely as a realm of coercion.

The new right therefore represents a fundamental challenge to paternalism strands within conservative thinking.

Centre stage in new right thinking is the revival of classical liberal economics. Keynesian orthodoxies were challenged by Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman, drawing on the work of classical liberal economists Adam Smith and Ricardo.

Central to this challenge was the rejection of the very notion of the ‘managed’ or ‘planned’ economy. State intervention was after all inversely related to economic success and freedom. Inefficiency was the norm in the most planned economies in the world (those in the Soviet bloc) and such planning and centralisation were also inimical to freedom. In essence they were closed societies.

Indeed in The Road To Serfdom (1948) Hayek attacked economic interventionism as implicitly totalitarian. Concomitant to this was the idea that failures in capitalism were not attributable to too much private enterprise but to too little. Correspondingly a decrease in the role of the state would result in greater economic efficiency and enhanced freedom. Unemployment and inflation in the 1970s was due to the unnatural inefficiencies in the system of economic planning which ultimately distorts the market.

Money is seen as the most effective mechanism for distribution of goods and services, and governments are limited to a basic role of ensuring financial stability. One could see the recent government guarantee of investors savings in the light of the recent financial crisis as acting in good faith with neo-liberal values in this regard.

However governments may also if they are too interventionist distort the market and fuel inflation. Inflation erodes the value of money and destabilises the economy and thus society. It is therefore a government’s primary duty to exercise fiscal restraint.

The economic policies of both Thatcher and Reagan in the 1980s were heavily influenced by such ideas. Both administrations allowed unemployment (the chief ill in a Keynesian world view) to rise sharply. Both administrations instituted tax cuts and cuts in social spending. Policies of privatisation were pursued not only in the UK but also in France. Nationalised industries are inefficient because they are not subject to the disciplines of the market. The activities of firms were also de-regulated.

Emphasis on neo-liberalism on negative rather than positive freedoms. i.e. the absence of constraint. Further welfarism is an attack on individual property rights. (Nozick, 1974). Welfare is a major cause of social breakdown. It creates one - parent families and is of itself a cause of poverty. It reduces self reliance and initiative and creates a culture of dependency. It limits the freedom of those on welfare and those who contribute to welfare through their taxes.

Finally, welfare in fact exacerbates poverty as it robs people of their aspirations. Thus there is an economic and a moral case for reducing the activities of the state.

Conservatism Today

Conservatism has been the most electorally popular political philosophy of the 20th Century. In the 52 years since 1945 the conservatives have been in office 36 years in the UK.

It has shown it has great capacity to adapt and evolve and to challenge and defeat its principal ideological nemesis socialism.

Paradoxically as conservatism was principally defined by its antipathy to socialism how may it be defined in a post-socialist age?

If ‘rolling back the frontiers of the state’ results, as many have predicted a greater widening of inequality and there is no corrective role for the state in this regard might social exclusion result in the weakening of support for traditional forms of authority and free market economics itself.

Additionally with the ascendancy of the new right Conservatism as a creed has become increasingly ideological and in the words of Ian Gilmour, no longer ‘travels light’. This threatens its core ability to adapt to changing circumstances which as Edmund Burke pointed out with regards to states could imply that an inability to change translates into an inability to conserve.
Freedom is seen in essentially economic terms – neo conservatism remains socially conservative and there is an emphasis on economic freedom accompanied by strict individual responsibility and social order.

Neo conservatives call for economic freedom along side the restoration of authority in social life. Gamble, 1988 calls this an attachment to the free economy and a strong state.

Neo-conservatism is in essence a reaction against the social liberalism of the permissive society. It does not allow for example for the possibility of a moral equivalence between heterosexual and homosexual relationships.

The strict moral standards of society should be championed and are often evoked in terms of ‘back to basics’ (John Major) or a return to ‘Victorian values’ (Margaret Thatcher) whilst in the United States organisations such as the Moral Majority stress family values – opposition to sex before marriage, abortion, homosexuality and the like.

Neo conservatives detect two principal dangers in permissive values. These are that freedom of choice in the moral realm may lead to immoral choices. Secondly moral pluralism and diversity threatens the cohesion of society - civilised standards would be impossible to maintain in a society of individuals were simply free to choose as they please.

The permissive society is a breeding ground for family breakdown, anti-social behaviour, crime, educational failure and a litany of other social problems.

To counter this deterrence through tough punishment is required. In the United States this has led to the restoration of the death penalty and in the United Kingdom the largest ever prison population.

The Marxist commentator Stuart Hall has called Mrs Thatcher’s brand of policies ‘authoritarian populism’ responding to a general sense of malaise in society over the collapse in standards. This is the state needs to be strong in the moral sphere, providing guidance and deterrence in equal measure.

Another feature is resurgent nationalism or what Giddens has referred to as a civic religion acting as some form of social glue or cement binding society together. A decline in religious belief at least in the UK necessitates filling the void with some new religion. Patriotism and nationalism perform this function perfectly. Even politicians of the left such as Gordon Brown recognise the value of such appeals. He used the terms British, Britain or Britishness no less than 73 times in his inaugural speech as Labour leader and Prime Minister.

Such appeals are also at the heart of the Euroscepticism that influences the parties thinking and policies on the European Union.

Oliver Letwin (1992) has argued that neoliberalism and neo conservatism are compatible. Thatcherism consisted of the vigorous virtues which imply in economic terms rolling back the frontiers of the state but in moral or social terms greater intervention through more policing, tougher sentencing and the like.

Truly unfettered capitalism however, it may be argued place strains on society, through the inequities that arise. Further globalisation of markets dilutes national sovereignty.