**Key Thinker - Socialism**

**Beatrice Webb (1858–1943)**

Beatrice Webb made a significant contribution to the development of early democratic socialism and its belief in the inevitability of gradualism (see above). Webb’s socialism was defined by four principles:

1. Capitalism was the principal cause of ‘crippling poverty and demeaning inequality’ in society and a ‘corrupting force’ for humanity, fostering ‘unnatural’ levels of avarice and selfishness among men and women.
2. Neither paternalism nor philanthropy was a sustainable solution to the problems of poverty and inequality.
3. Poverty and inequality were most likely to be eliminated through vigorous trade unionism and extensive state intervention.
4. Effective reform tends to be gradual rather than revolutionary.

•  Along with her husband Sidney, Webb became active in the Fabian Society, an organisation committed to evolutionary socialism via reforms made at Westminster. She was instrumental in the Fabians’ decision to align with the emerging Labour Party and was involved in drafting Clause IV of Labour’s 1918 constitution. Although this committed Labour to ‘common ownership’ of the British economy, Webb helped ensure that Labour would pursue this goal via the existing political system.

•  Between 1905 and 1909, Webb served on a Royal Commission that examined the state’s approach to poverty. Her celebrated Minority Report argued that the state should guarantee ‘a sufficient nourishment and training when young, a living wage when able-bodied, treatment when sick, and modest but secure livelihood when disabled or aged’. Much of this anticipated the Beveridge Report of 1942, which was implemented by a Labour government after 1945. Webb’s views on poverty and inequality therefore pre-dated both the agenda of a democratic socialist government and the emergence of a welfare state in the UK.

