



## PHILOSOPHY LAB

Imagine that the United States has evolved into a libertarian paradise. The government is small, charged only with the limited functions of protecting society and economic systems from coercion and fraud. All other social and economic benefits are the responsibility of individuals. People have maximum freedom to pursue their economic goals without interference from the government. Taxes are extremely low, raised only to fund the military and whatever forces are needed to secure people's social and economic rights. There are no entitlement programs—no Social Security, no Medicare, no health care programs, no student loans, no welfare systems of any kind. Government regulation of business is minimal, as is consumer protection. There are no minimum-wage laws and no government attempts to redistribute wealth or to help the poor, disabled, disadvantaged, or elderly.

**Would you want to live in such a society? Would your life be better or worse in it? What would you like or dislike most about this social system? Overall, would people be better or worse off in a thoroughly libertarian America?**

**16** Is Marx correct in saying that a society's means of production shape its political and philosophical ideas? What about religion, culture, social reformers—can any of these influence a society's thinking?

Capitalism is war; socialism is peace.

—Karl Liebknecht

**17** Do ideas affect history? Marx says no. But his socialist ideas seem to have affected history profoundly. Does this fact disprove Marx's claim?

The workers' wages decline, more become unemployed, and their exploitation by the capitalists continues. As their situation worsens, Marx observes, they have an increased sense of *alienation*: They are no longer valued as persons, for they have become mere cogs in the capitalist machinery, and they can no longer take pride in their work, for it has been downgraded into mindless assembly-line motions. But ultimately the success of the bourgeoisie proves to be their undoing. They produce, as Marx says, their own gravediggers. They unwittingly create a large, poor, angry proletarian class that has had enough of capitalism and the woes that come with it. A proletarian revolution sweeps the old order away and eventually ushers in a classless society (synthesis) in which the means of production belong to everyone and wealth is shared equally among equals.

A frequent criticism of socialism is that a distribution of goods according to needs and abilities would require coercion by the state. For socialism to work, people must be forced to do the jobs that match their skills, not the jobs they prefer. And they must be compelled to accept the benefits (monetary or otherwise) that match their needs, not the benefits they most desire.

Critics also accuse socialist systems of providing no incentive for people to excel at their jobs. Under socialism, people are rewarded according to their needs, not by how well or how hard they work. So what inducement is there to be more ambitious or efficient?