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## EDITORIAL PERSPECTIVES

### THE SOCIALISM DISCUSSION WIDENS — AND THIS IS JUST THE BEGINNING!

With this special issue, “Designing Socialism: Visions, Projections, Models,” we confirm what is becoming a *Science & Society* tradition: every ten years, the April issue of the year ending in “2” (e.g., 1992, 2002, and now 2012) will be special, a major worldwide pulse-taking of the state of play in *theoretical socialism*, which is a proper subset of Marxist inquiry and action in general. The point, explained by Guest Editor Al Campbell more fully in the Introduction, is to place this scientific envisioning practice at the service of (as Marx and Engels might say) the movements going on before our eyes, while drawing upon those movements — including all of the experiences and lessons of post-capitalist social construction, both positive and negative — in a way that differentiates this project from arbitrary and utopian speculation.

The spectre of TINA haunts the new rebellions that are taking place around the globe. Spokespersons for the status quo want to know what the Occupy Movement’s “demands” are! As the occupiers have repeatedly explained, “demands” are what we ask someone to “give” us. But Wall Street (and the class and system it represents) don’t “give”; they *take!* This movement will not issue “demands”; it will, eventually, *inform* the capitalist ruling classes that economic value coming from working people is now to be redirected, toward meeting the needs of working people and building societies that promote that redirection, rather than the opposite. So the questions about how to do that, not to speak of answers to those questions, have just begun to emerge. This issue is a contribution toward that end. I would love to be around in 2022, to see what the S&S special socialism issue of that year is able to summarize!

Needless to say, we won’t wait until then to continue this inquiry, and we invite readers to “chip in” with new contributions.

Our deepest thanks to Guest Editor Al Campbell for “envisioning” this issue and working hard to pull it together. He would be the first to say that the worth of the project depends on what comes next — how the discussion progresses, and deepens, and becomes ever more international in scope. On with the dance!

D. L.



## INTRODUCTION

### **Designing Socialism: Visions, Projections, Models**

**AL CAMPBELL**

Fortunately, the strong — and, in our view, misguided — 20th-century disapprobation in many Marxist circles against “envisioning the future” has greatly weakened, though not entirely disappeared, by 2012. Thirty years of deepening capitalist crisis have popularized the folk wisdom: “It’s not enough to know what you’re against, you need to know what you’re for.”

Marx and Engels developed their world view in the 1840s in the shadow of the then-dominant visions of a better world, among thinkers such as Owen, St. Simon, Fourier and Cabet. As they repeatedly explained for the rest of their lives, they never opposed these social philosophers’ goals *per se*, rather, their historical materialist method involved rejection of the way the philosophers’ systems were created. Marx and Engels argued that meaningful visions of a post-capitalist society could not spring fully formed from the heads of great intellectuals, like Athena from the head of Zeus. To the contrary, they maintained: “We do not want to dogmatically anticipate the world, but only want to find the new world through criticism of the old” and “the reform of consciousness consists *only* in making the world aware of its own consciousness, in awakening it out of its dream about itself, in *explaining* to it the meaning of its own actions” (Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. 3, Progress Publishers, 1975, pp. 142, 144).

Capitalism — like all social systems, including post-capitalist ones — is a social system driven by contradictions. Dialectics views change as resolution of existing contradictions (creating a new system with

new contradictions, and hence continual social development). It is from that understanding that Marx and Engels were able to “envision the future.” Post-capitalist society arises out of human (class) struggle to resolve the primary contradictions of capitalism that stunt and warp human development and block our potential “to be more fully human.” Hence they envisioned the next step in social evolution to consist of the elimination of capitalist markets and commodities and their replacement with socially determined and controlled planning, the transcendence of capitalist alienation and the development of authentic “social individuality,” the development of a society of “free and associated individuals,” and so on. These ideas about the future post-capitalist society are not arbitrary speculations; they are rooted in the resolution of real contradictions in the present, negation of existing barriers to human development. This perspective appears throughout Marx and Engels’ early writings, as well as the *Manifesto*, *Capital*, *Critique of the Gotha Program*, *Anti-Dühring* (and its extremely popular and influential excerpt, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*), and many other works.

It is important to keep in mind that the very method precludes detailed prediction of the specifics of post-capitalist institutions, exactly because history is a contingent process. There is more than one way to resolve a given contradiction, and which resolution will occur will come out of class struggles that take place in historically varied circumstances. This of course means that, so far as details and specifics are concerned, many different forms of socialism are possible. History should already have made this point clear: there were many different specific types of slave societies, many different specific types of feudalism and many different specific types of capitalism, though in each case there was a central logic to the mode of production that located it in its appropriate category.

There is another (and in political practice more important) reason, beyond an intellectual understanding of dialectics, for the small flourishing of work considering and discussing what we should build in order to transcend capitalism. The TINA (“There Is No Alternative”) dogma has taken deep root among the working class, particularly in the First World, over the course of the rise of neoliberalism. This is both a source and a measure of the weak working-class resistance to continually deteriorating conditions of life. Polls in the United States, for example, show discontent with the existing system at its highest

level since World War II. At the time of this writing, the increasingly worldwide protest movement known as “Occupy Wall Street” is showing preliminary signs of possible weakening of the TINA syndrome, an extremely hopeful sign. But this has still not translated into mass political movements to fight growing inequality and poverty, deteriorating standards of living, rapid destruction of the environment and loss of constitutional rights. There has not even been a surge of activism against the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, even though all polls indicate that popular opposition to these wars is greater than at the high point of opposition to the Vietnam War. Overcoming TINA is therefore a central condition for revitalizing the active social struggle for a better world.

Of course, causation does not run in only one direction, from ideas about feasible alternatives to the existing capitalist system to developing social struggles against that system. Ideas do, however, emerge in a dialectical interplay with developing struggles, and thereby contribute (and are a necessary contribution) to promoting those struggles.

It is in this frame that this collection of articles is presented.

This is in fact the third contribution to this necessary effort in the pages of *Science & Society*. The first appeared in Spring 1992; the second, exactly ten years later, in Spring 2002. The nature of each of those previous issues reflected both the state of the world at the time (an “external influence”), and the development of the debate itself (an “internal influence”).

The first issue, titled “Socialism: Alternative Visions and Models,” appeared, as noted in the Editorial Perspectives section of the second issue, “in the shadow of the great collapse: the demise of the 20th-century ‘state socialist’ regimes in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.” It also appeared at the ideological highpoint of neoliberalism. That form of capitalism, originating above all in the United States, had been imposed on the rest of the First World and much of the Third World, through the enthusiastic support of local elites plus direct economic pressure from both First World governments and the Bretton Woods institutions. The domination of neoliberal ideology, and in particular its “markets über alles” dimension, not only pushed the (bastard) Keynesian ideas of the postwar era to the back burner among pro-capitalist forces, but penetrated socialist thinking as well. The first issue included articles reflecting the three strands of thought

that were dominant among socialists in those theoretically difficult times: “socialist pessimism,” market socialism, and the current that was trying to continue, or rediscover, the road whose broad outlines had been drawn by Marx and Engels.

The economic world in 2002 was a very different place from 1992. Neoliberalism had done OK for itself over the preceding decade in much of the First World on the back of the unsustainable stock market bubble, but that bubble had just burst. More important to what was soon to become a global tide of opposition to neoliberalism, many people in Latin America (and Africa, though that continent did not go on to play the same political role) had theoretically absorbed what neoliberalism had done to it in the 1980s (“the lost decade”). The 1990s then brought more of the same to Latin America. But further, economic malaise then spread in the form of the “Asian crisis” to countries that had until then been held up as the demonstration of neoliberalism’s development potential for the Third World, notwithstanding that these countries’ previous “success” had actually rested largely on their non-neoliberal export promotion policies, which in fact faltered as they became more neoliberal. And the greatly superior economic performance of China, with its very non-neoliberal policies, was now on a scale that attracted attention throughout the Third World.

Internally in the debate on socialism, the “socialist pessimism” strand had largely disappeared. Some of its proponents simply gave up on socialism, trying to turn to a middle-of-the-road social democracy, though that was complicated by the rapid move to the right and adoption of much of neoliberalism by most First World social democratic movements, epitomized by Tony Blair’s “New Labor.” But above all it was the rise of resistance to neoliberalism in Latin America at this time that largely (not entirely) eliminated “socialist pessimism.” Historically, when new forces (including some with state power) begin to discuss the problems of the current form of capitalism and the need to transcend it, pessimism has never been particularly appealing to those hoping for a better world.

Market socialism, to the contrary, remained a major current in the debate on socialism, often drawing support from the market-socialist interpretation of current developments in China. But by 2002 most of the general issues concerning the reasons for or against market socialism, as compared with a socialism that rejects the “invisible hand” in

favor of economic activity based on conscious social and democratic planning and production, had been clearly laid out over the preceding decade. Further confrontations between these two positions were by then yielding no new major insights.

In line with the changed world and the decade of evolution of the debate itself, the second issue in 2002, “Building Socialism Theoretically: Alternatives to Capitalism and the Invisible Hand,” set itself a different goal from the first one. A major attack point by the advocates of market socialism was that, regardless of how humanistic and just plain desirable such a non-market socialism might be, it simply could not work (again, echoes of TINA). Hence the second issue set itself the task of presenting viable models of socialism without markets that “must embrace participatory, democratic coordination and principled methods of evaluation and choice, adequate to the goal of human development and fulfillment that is the ultimate basis of socialist thought and activity.” The socialist project “must begin to face the challenge to show how a true socialist alternative can actually *work* . . .” In line with the perspective outlined above, this project neither could nor should produce blueprints of the details of such a society. Rather, the goal was to show that particular non-market approaches to building socialism with the indicated desirable qualities were viable. And while the 2002 issue narrowed the field to those rejecting market socialism, the resulting discussion seemed almost as varied as before. As noted above, it would be anti-historical to assume that there is just one form of viable socialism, even when one has restricted consideration to non-market systems.

The present special issue — confirming S&S’ ten-year cycle of these issues and appearing as the Spring (now April) 2012 issue — intends to continue the discussion (largely) as outlined in the 2002 issue. Given the evolution of the world and the debate itself since then, however, we have provided it with a particular structure. The early 2000s saw an important increase in the number of people involved in discussions on how to move beyond neoliberalism, in particular but not only in Latin America. While as always such discussions in their first phase have involved proposals from academics, intellectuals and even some governments (such as in Argentina) that are more reformist than socialist, still the number of the latter likewise has mushroomed, in particular in the streets of Latin America and even in the governments of Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador. Coming from

another direction, the questions of where China, Vietnam and Cuba are going (three distinct questions) feed into the discussion. Then the onset in 2007–08 of the deepest crisis for capitalism since the 1930s has begun to revive the discussion (still at a very low level) in the First World. Parties to the left of the Social Democrats have won a handful of seats in parliaments in a number of countries in Europe, and certainly discussions in the streets of the countries suffering the most, such as Greece and to a lesser extent Portugal, Spain and Ireland, have put the issue of socialism back on the agenda for discussion. And given the nearly universal prediction that this crisis will both deepen and last for many years, we can expect these discussions to increase markedly in the future.

Looking at the debates over the last decade (and before), one is struck by the extent to which the questions directed at advocates of socialism boil down to a fairly small set of major concerns. It is this that has given rise to the issue's structure. Instead of the usual collection of articles, in which each author focuses on his or her particular areas of interest, this issue has been structured so that each author (or team of authors) is required to address each of a given set of questions. These questions have been designed to capture the core issues and problems that have arisen within the debate (they cannot, of course, cover or anticipate every possible topic). One important result of this procedure is that the reader can compare the authors' different positions across the spectrum of central issues in the debate, and not end up with a series of interesting and valuable but unrelated pieces that "talk past each other."

Specifically then, we asked the authors to address five (broad) questions. The texts of the five questions appear immediately following this Introduction. But in a nutshell they are: 1) Why socialism? (The ultimate rationale.) 2) Feasibility and coordination. (How would it work?) 3) Incentives and consciousness. 4) Stages and productive forces. 5) Social and long-term planning.

The issue has been organized into five chapters, each one containing the answers by all the authors to a given question, to facilitate comparison. The order of the authors in each section changes from chapter to chapter, to avoid any suggestion of giving priority to one author's answers. Of course there are two ways to read the answers: a) comparing answers by all of the authors to a single question side by side; b) reading all of a single author's answers together, to grasp

their interconnection as expressions of a single viewpoint. Both reading methods are important! Unfortunately, we had to choose one organizational structure, and we chose the one that facilitates the first of these methods. As an aid to the second, the Table of Contents lists the subsections of each chapter, with page numbers, and the usual *Science & Society* running head format has also been replaced by one that helps the reader locate the authors' contributions, within each chapter.

We think we have assembled a remarkable team of six participants — four individuals, one team of two individuals working together, and one team of three. (Biographical information is in “The Contributors,” following “The Questions,” below.) Some of these are long-established writers and theorists; one of the teams involves younger and less-established colleagues. The Anglophone world is well represented (as it would be in an English-language journal), but we are proud now to include Marta Harnecker, a major figure in political debate in Latin America, whose contributions were written in Spanish and have been translated (here we wish to acknowledge gratefully the work of Julio Huato in facilitating these translations), and a group of Chinese scholars addressing our questions from the unique vantage-point of the Chinese experience. This is a step, even if a small one, toward full internationalization of the socialism discussion.

For readers who would like to follow up further on the work of the Contributors, and their sources, we have collected all of their references into a single Bibliography, which follows the five “Questions” chapters. Also included in the issue are a review article by Steve Ellner on Michael Lebowitz' *The Socialist Alternative*, and Mark Jablonowski's review of *Socialism, Economic Calculation and Entrepreneurship*, by Jesús Huerta de Soto.

We hope that this collection, like the two before it, will contribute to furthering the debate on transcending capitalism, and the debate on socialism as it stands today, in the tumultuous world of the present.