

Democratic Socialism

America is the only major industrialized democratic society without a significant democratic socialist party. Nevertheless, various types of radicals (and, to some extent, liberals) have brought to the American political conversation many democratic socialist ideas, such as the following. Although capitalist institutions, processes, and values can play legitimate roles in a good society, modern life is dominated by capitalism, resulting in economic inefficiencies, social injustices, and moral degradation. To curtail capitalist domination, private property and economic inequalities need not be abolished, but the public should control the use of property and make economic necessities equally available to all. To curtail capitalist domination, liberal values involving individual freedoms and rights need not be eliminated, but they must be complemented with other values emphasizing social solidarity, respect and concern for others, and individual responsibility to the community. Ending capitalist domination does not require revolutionary change but, rather, can and should take place slowly, through evolutionary processes by which citizens acquire socialist values, become empowered politically, and use democratic governments as primary vehicles for achieving a good and just society.

Socialist sentiments are probably nearly as old as human life, but the ideology of socialism is a reaction to capitalism. Thus, the precursors of socialism—people like Sir Thomas More (1478–1535),¹ Gerrard Winstanley (1609–1660?),² François-Noël (Gracchus) Babeuf (1760–1797),³ and most impor-

¹More published *Utopia* in 1516; in it he strongly criticized the acquisitive society that was emerging in Europe.

²Winstanley was the leading theoretician of the Diggers—a radical group within Cromwell's army during the English Civil War between 1651–1660. Winstanley called for communal ownership of and access to land. See George Shulman, *Radicalism and Reverence: The Political Thought of Gerrard Winstanley* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

³Babeuf sought to abolish private property during the French Revolution and advocated absolute equality. He wrote, "Let there be no other difference between people than that of age and sex. Since all have the same needs and same faculties, let them henceforth have the same education

Sidebar 9-1

Some Democratic Socialists and Their Main Writings

Eduard Bernstein (1850–1932) <i>Evolutionary Socialism</i> (1899)	Alec Nove* <i>The Economics of Feasible Socialism</i> (1983)
Sidney Webb (1859–1947) and Beatrice Potter Webb (1858–1943) <i>Socialism in England</i> (1890)	Anthony (C. A. R.) Crosland (1918–1977) <i>The Future of Socialism</i> (1956)
Richard H. Tawney (1880–1962) <i>Equality</i> (1931)	Irving Howe (1920–1993) <i>Beyond the Welfare State</i> (1982) <i>Socialism and America</i> (1985)
George (G. D. H.) Cole (1889–1959) <i>History of Socialism</i> (1953–1960)	Michael Harrington (1928–1989) <i>The Other America: Poverty in the United States</i> (1962) <i>Twilight of Capitalism</i> (1976)
Erich Fromm (1900–1980) <i>Escape from Freedom</i> (1941) <i>The Sane Society</i> (1955)	Michael Walzer* <i>Spheres of Justice</i> (1983)

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tantly Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778)⁴—wrote as capitalism began to emerge. Nevertheless, the term “socialism” did not appear until 1827, when it was introduced in the *Cooperative Magazine* by proponents of the ideas of Robert Owen (1771–1858). Owen suggested that the problems of capitalism could be overcome by inventing and developing new types of social communities that emphasized cooperation, sociability, and social control over private property and wealth.⁵ Nevertheless, Owen and other early socialists were criticized by Marx and Engels as being **utopian socialists** because they thought that the truth of socialist principles could be shown by philosophy and science, that productive and harmonious communes would be developed by enlightened industrialists, true Christians, and social reformers, and that the success of these communes would prompt everyone to embrace them. Their belief that socialism would be embraced by everyone simply because it would ultimately benefit everyone was rejected by Marx. Perceiving that

and the same diet. They are content with the same sun and the same air for all; why should not the same portion and the quality of nourishment suffice for each of them?” For a discussion of Babeuf, see Steven Lukes, “Socialism and Equality,” *Dissent* 22 (spring 1975), p. 155.

⁴Rousseau’s anticipation of socialism includes his critique of the liberal bourgeois society that was emerging in Europe by the middle of the eighteenth century (in his *First Discourse* [1749]), his analysis of the evolution and causes of inequality (in his *Second Discourse* [1755]), and his vision of a communal society where people transcended self-interest and willed the good of all (in *The Social Contract* [1762]).

⁵Among the many interesting discussions of the utopian socialists is that of Robert Heilbroner, *The Worldly Philosophers* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1953), chap. 5.

the immediate material interests of the upper classes would ensure their allegiance to capitalism, Marx theorized that socialism could only occur by means of a revolution by the working class. Under Marx's influence, socialism became a revolutionary ideology during most of the latter half the nineteenth century. Despite its many precursors—from More to Marx—democratic socialism did not emerge as a distinct and complete ideology until radicals absorbed Marx's critical understanding of capitalism while they abandoned his theory that capitalism could only be superseded by socialism through revolutionary means. The Fabians in England and the Revisionists in Germany were instrumental in this regard and are thus the proper founders of democratic socialism.

In 1884, the Fabian Society was founded by a group of intellectuals led by Sidney Webb (1859–1947), his wife Beatrice Potter Webb (1858–1943), and the famous playwright George Bernard Shaw (1856–1950). The **Fabians** shared Marx's indictment of capitalism and were deeply committed to egalitarianism, humanism, and Christian morality. Nevertheless, they wanted to move away from capitalism and toward socialism gradually. Such an orientation was symbolized by their name, which they took from the Roman general Fabius. Just as Fabius defeated the stronger forces of Hannibal in 209 B.C.E. by his patient, cautious, and defensive strategies, the Fabians hoped to subdue the overwhelming power of capitalism by a patient, cautious, and defensive campaign demonstrating that socialism was economically, socially, and morally superior to capitalism. As support for socialism increased, the Fabians believed that socialists could be elected to Parliament, where they could introduce socialist reforms in the capitalist system. In 1901, the Fabians cooperated with leaders of the major British trade unions to form the Labour Party and, by 1906, they had secured twenty-nine seats in the House of Commons. Forty years later, following World War II, the Labour Party captured control of the House of Commons, and—under the rules of Britain's parliamentary system—it thus formed the government. While in power, the Labourites implemented a number of socialist policies—such as nationalizing the production of electricity, steel, and coal, and socializing the distribution of medical care. Throughout the century, the Fabian Society has continued to develop and defend socialism, and the Labour Party has been the principal competitor of the Conservative Party and a major force in British politics.

In continental Europe, a variety of socialist parties and movements formed toward the end of the nineteenth century, including the *Sozialistische Partei Deutschlands* (SPD) in Germany. By 1895, the SPD membership was divided between revolutionary (or orthodox) Marxists and Revisionists—Marxists whose views were influenced by the Fabians. The most prominent Revisionist, Eduard Bernstein (1850–1932), argued that orthodox Marxists had misinterpreted Marx, making his theory of change too deterministic. According to Bernstein, the orthodox Marxist doctrine of dialectical materialism—which claimed that capitalism would collapse and that socialism would arise when economic forces developed in predictable ways and produced an inevitable crisis—gave the SPD little to do but to sit around and await the

revolution.⁶ In 1899, Bernstein wrote *Evolutionary Socialism*, which argued that capitalism was not about to collapse, that the working class was becoming less revolutionary, and that increases in democratization permitted the SPD to achieve political power and institute reforms leading to socialism. However, Bernstein's aspiration to realize socialism through democratic means was thwarted at the turn of the century because Germany had an imperial system, headed by Kaiser Wilhelm II. Even though the SPD eventually won more popular votes in national legislative elections than any other party in Germany, it was unable to govern or enact socialist legislation during the Second Reich (1870–1918). The chaotic conditions of the Weimar Republic (1919–1933) and Hitler's totalitarian rule during the Third Reich (1933–1945) also provided few opportunities for the SPD to institute reforms. When the Federal Republic of Germany was created in West Germany following World War II, however, the SPD reemerged as a leading contender for power. During the 1970s, the SPD was the dominant party in a coalition that ruled West Germany, and its leader, Willy Brandt, became chancellor. Today, the SPD governs a variety of states and cities in a unified Germany and retains the potential to win control of the central government.

With the exception of the United States, all industrialized Western democracies have significant social democratic parties, and the ideology of democratic socialism remains a major voice in these nations. At one time or another since 1975, social democratic parties have ruled in Britain, France, West Germany, Greece, Spain, Portugal, Norway, Denmark, and other western European democracies. Social democratic parties have also formed governments in several provinces in Canada since the 1950s. Democratic socialism has been advanced by leaders of postcolonial Africa—such as Léopold Sédar Senghor of Senegal, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, and Gamel Abdel Nasser of Egypt—and socialists have effectively governed Tanzania, Algeria, and Guinea-Bissau.⁷ Since 1989, many of the formerly communist nations in Eastern Europe have been guided by social democratic values and programs. However, social democracy's greatest success story has been in Sweden.

The Social Democratic Labor Party (SAP) first came to power in Sweden in 1932. By governing almost continuously since then, the SAP has helped transform Sweden from one of Europe's poorer nations to one of the world's most affluent. Simultaneously, Sweden has achieved one of the world's most equal distributions of income. In pursuit of economic prosperity and income equality, the SAP developed an extensive welfare state, but it eschewed public ownership of the means of production. Today about eighty-five percent of Swedish industry remains privately owned. While the SAP has thus aban-

⁶Bernstein's main opponent, Karl Kautsky (1854–1938), provided a basis for this interpretation by maintaining that "the task of Social Democracy consists, not in bringing about the inevitable catastrophe, but in delaying it as long as possible, that is to say, in avoiding with care anything that could resemble a provocation. . . ." This quote, along with an excellent summary of revisionism, is provided by David McLellan in *Marxism After Marx* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1979), pp. 20–41. ⁷For a discussion of African socialism, see Crawford Young, *Ideology and Development in Africa* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), pp 97–182.

done one of the main programs of the Fabians and Revisionists, its successes have helped to reorient the focus of democratic socialism from economic production to economic distribution.⁸

In this chapter, we provide an account of democratic socialism, which we refer to as "socialism" for brevity. Our presentation is complicated by the fact there are several varieties of democratic socialism.⁹ On the one hand, there is a relatively centralist vision—exemplified by the Fabians and the Revisionists and still often present in the rhetoric of socialist parties—stressing that economic production and distribution be managed by the national state. On the other hand, there is a relatively decentralist vision—exemplified by the utopian socialists and recent communitarian socialists and evident in the actual governing practices of socialists—stressing local attacks on capitalist domination, extensive citizen participation in workplaces and local communities, and a "socialized" (rather than "nationalized") approach to the just distribution of goods and services. The tensions between these different varieties of socialism ensure that when the term "evolution" is linked to socialism, it refers not only to the preferred means of change for achieving socialist values, but also to continuing development of the goals and principles of socialists.

THE POLITICAL BASES

Problems

For democratic socialists, most economic, social, and political problems result from the pervasive influence of capitalism. Because other ideologies also focus on the problematic aspects of capitalism, it is useful to compare and contrast the socialist critique of capitalism with those developed by contemporary liberals, fascists, and Marxists (and communists).

Like contemporary liberals, socialists believe that a pure capitalist system is plagued by various market failures. Recurring business cycles produce deep economic recessions that undermine economic productivity and prosperity. Free markets provide inadequate supplies of some goods (like housing) and services (like medical care) that the public needs but cannot afford. Market competition encourages businesses to externalize their costs of production onto the public (e.g., by dumping waste by-products into the environment). But socialists believe that a critique of capitalism that focuses solely on its economic shortcomings is superficial. They believe that liberals fail to see how the capitalist system dominates and undermines many other aspects of human life, as we shall see.

Like fascists, socialists believe that the individualistic and materialistic val-

⁸See Joanne Barkan in "Sweden: Not Yet Paradise, but . . ." *Dissent* (spring 1989), pp. 147–151; Barkan, "The End of the Swedish Model?" *Dissent* (spring 1992), pp. 192–198; and Robert Heilbroner et al., "From Sweden to Socialism: A Small Symposium on a Big Question," *Dissent* (winter 1991), pp. 96–110.

⁹Anthony Wright, *Socialisms: Theory and Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

ues of capitalism undermine unity and service to the community. They believe that people take more pride in their work and obtain a greater sense of achievement from it when they are contributing to the broader society rather than merely toiling for the benefit of their private employers. However, socialists find the fascist alternative to capitalism to be worse than the original problem. The totalitarian state created by fascists to control capitalism has produced far more tyranny and far less liberty and equality than exist in capitalist societies.

Like Marxists and communists, socialists believe that capitalism leads to human alienation, economic vulnerability, and social injustice. They find offensive the extensive income inequalities that exist under capitalism and doubt that the large incomes that capitalists earn are justified, given the much smaller incomes that most men and women obtain from actually working. But socialists regard the communist solution to capitalism to be excessive. Instead of abolishing capitalism, they believe capitalism need only be kept in its proper place.

Keeping capitalism in its place, however, is difficult. While socialists disagree with the Marxist view that capitalism totally determines all aspects of social life, they agree that the institutions, processes, and morality of capitalism dominate—or extensively influence—modern societies.

First, capitalism dominates economic distributions. Socialists recognize that capitalism has a legitimate role to play in distributing the kind of commodities that people want to purchase downtown or in shopping malls, but in most liberal societies, necessities are illegitimately distributed through capitalist principles and institutions. In the United States, for example, the availability of health care is often dependent on the capacity of the afflicted to pay for it, and the willingness of some relatively wealthy people to pay extensively for various medical treatments prompts doctors and hospitals to set the costs of such treatments at levels beyond the reach of poor people. According to socialists, necessities like medical care should be allocated on the basis of need, not by market-based considerations, such as the ability to pay.¹⁰

Second, capitalism restricts human freedom by forcing people to do things in order to survive that they would not ordinarily choose to do. Because many necessities are distributed through capitalist markets, people are often required to make “desperate exchanges” and “trades of last resort.”¹¹ In order to obtain basic food and shelter, poor people may have to engage in demeaning, dangerous, excessive, and alienating work. When people must accept such work to purchase necessities, it is fallacious to claim that they are truly free participants in market exchanges.

Third, capitalism dominates democratic governments by influencing who obtains power and by distorting governmental policies. Socialists stress that money illegitimately buys political influence in liberal democracies. Those with wealth (or access to wealth) are well positioned to win democratic elec-

¹⁰Bernard Williams, “The Idea of Equality,” in *Philosophy, Politics, and Society*, edited by Peter Laslett and W. G. Runciman (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1962), p. 122.

¹¹Michael Walzer, *Spheres of Justice* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), p. 102.

tions and influence officeholders. Additionally, the needs of capitalism are strongly reflected in the issues atop the agendas of democratic governments and in the policies these governments adopt. Issues that threaten the profitability of capitalists are usually dismissed. Policies that increase the power and material well-being of the disadvantaged at the expense of capitalists are seldom adopted. Because economic prosperity and full employment are dependent on the investment decisions of capitalists, democratic governments pursue policies that make private investments profitable.¹² In short, socialists recognize that a capitalist-dominated economy creates conditions under which governments inevitably pursue "trickle-down" economic policies, where benefits are targeted in the first instance to the wealthy—with the hope that their reinvested profits will eventually benefit labor and the poor.

Fourth, capitalism enables business (corporate) decisions to be made unilaterally by those who own and manage capital. A wide array of decisions having serious consequences for workers and the broader community—such as whether to adopt new laborsaving technologies and whether to relocate plants—are made without input from workers, consumers, and the public.¹³ Many contemporary socialists are now willing to concede that capitalists can own and profit from private property, but they question whether ownership of capital gives capitalists a legitimate monopoly of power over important decisions regarding the use of capital. Just as the absence of political democracy leads to illegitimate domination of citizens by governmental authorities, so does the absence of industrial democracy lead to illegitimate domination of employees by capitalists.¹⁴

Fifth, capitalism dominates family life. Feminist socialists argue that capitalism encourages and supports patriarchal families. Fathers are empowered by their role as the primary revenue producers who pay for the goods that capitalism induces families to want. Mothers are relegated to a subordinate position as unpaid domestic servants, while also providing a flexible workforce, available for part-time and temporary jobs at reduced wage rates. Children are given little opportunity to explore their many potentialities but are instead socialized in the family to become productive and compliant men and women whose primary future function is to succeed in the capitalist system.¹⁵

Sixth, capitalism dominates our culture, determining the values we hold and pursue. Socialists recognize that capitalist practices manipulate citizen preferences—directly, by inducing people to want certain products through advertising, and indirectly, by maintaining a social system in which worth is

¹²Joshua Cohen and Joel Rogers, *On Democracy* (Hamondsworth Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1983), pp. 51–53.

¹³The tyranny of allowing capitalists to determine the fate of local communities through their plant relocation decisions is discussed by Barry Bluestone and Bennett Harrison, *The Deindustrialization of America: Plant Closings, Community Abandonment, and the Dismantling of Basic Industry* (New York: Basic Books, 1982).

¹⁴Walzer, *Spheres of Justice*, pp. 291–303.

¹⁵Alison Jagger's *Feminist Politics and Human Nature* (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Allenheld, 1983) is perhaps the most widely cited work in socialist feminism.

measured by economic exchange value. Socialists claim that the capitalist system induces everyone to seek material goods and economic advancement as their primary goals, but they argue that people who were truly in touch with their own needs—people whose goals had not been corrupted and who had not developed “false consciousness” because of the influence of capitalism—would recognize that their more important needs involve the expression of other values, such as engaging in meaningful and creative work, living in a healthy environment, living in harmony with others, and developing their intellectual and spiritual capacities. But such values are given far less emphasis than they deserve, because they have little economic value in capitalist societies.

Finally, capitalism dominates human psychology, undermining self-esteem and self-confidence. Capitalism breeds a corrupted sense of self—one that is strongly influenced by success and status in the economic marketplace. It is difficult for people to believe that they are important if they are in a subordinate position in the workplace and engaged in repetitive, meaningless work. When capitalist values and orientations dominate life, those who fail in economic competition are inclined to view themselves not only as economic losers, but as losers in life.¹⁶

In summary, socialists identify a wide range of problems in modern societies. By tracing the root or underlying cause of these problems to capitalism, socialism is the most radical of the pluralistic ideologies. Socialists “keep a weather eye on the nastier tendencies of capitalism,”¹⁷ because they understand its deficiencies better than do contemporary liberals and conservatives. Still, socialism remains within the pluralist tradition because socialists tolerate capitalism and do not seek its abolition. Instead, they wish to limit its domination over economic, social, and political life. Rather than seeking to abolish private property, they wish to limit the benefits that accrue to those who own property. Rather than seeking to institute absolute economic equality, they wish to limit the excessive pride, luxury, and power that accompany the concentration of wealth.

Goals

To alleviate the problems of capitalism without eliminating capitalism, socialists seek a transformation of cultural values. Unlike Marxists, socialists believe that the basic values supported by democratic capitalism can be reformulated and extended in a socialist manner and incorporated into the culture of a society wherein capitalist institutions play an important role. When liberal values are transformed into socialist ones, broad popular support for curbing the abuses of capitalism and limiting its dominance can be developed, and this popular support can form the basis for public and governmental control of capitalism.

¹⁶John Schaar, “Equal Opportunity and Beyond,” *Equality: Nomos IX*, edited by J. Roland Pennock and John W. Chapman (New York: Atherton Press, 1967), pp. 238–239.

¹⁷Robert Kuttner, “Socialism, Liberalism, and Democracy,” *The American Prospect* (spring 1992), p. 7.

The key to reformulating and extending liberal values into socialist ones involves rethinking individualism and placing a greater emphasis on community. Socialists do not want to abandon individualism, but rather than focusing on how solitary individuals can maximize their interests and freedoms, socialists want to focus on how people can cooperate with each other to attain a more satisfying communal life that will sustain their individuality and enhance their real freedom.

Socialists believe that both classical and contemporary liberals have a weak conception of **communal harmony**. For classical liberals, community (or civil society) is only an agreement among atomized individuals to refrain from trampling on each other's rights. Cooperation in such a liberal community is limited to engaging in mutually advantageous exchanges and to establishing a government with the capacity to secure individual rights. For contemporary liberals, community occurs when diverse groups tolerate each other, and cooperation is limited to solving problems and working toward social stability. Socialists agree that such cooperation is essential, but argue that a much deeper sense of community and fraternity is needed. When people live in a liberal culture and work in a capitalist economy stressing competition, rugged individualism, and materialism, they have no experience with, and thus no appreciation for, genuine community. Capitalism sustains only pseudo communities where people coexist by adhering to various norms and rules and where they are pleasant to each other as long as their relationships are mutually advantageous with respect to their individual interests. But genuine community can only occur when everyone is regarded as an equally valuable member of the community, when people feel that it is safe to express their individual differences, when people are committed to the mutual growth that occurs when they learn from the process of exploring their differences, and when people delight in the sense of belonging, concern, and mutuality that is imparted to the individual by his or her membership in the collectivity.¹⁸

Fraternity is not an abstract love of humanity or a total identification of the individual with the group. Instead, fraternity is an attitude of friendship, fellow feeling, mutual respect, support, empathy, sensitivity, and care.¹⁹ But, more than simply an attitude of benevolence towards others, fraternity involves cooperative behavior whereby people treat each other with genuine respect. When people have genuine respect for others, they refrain from trying to control or dominate others and they do not flaunt their superior resources or successes before others. More than sustaining and enhancing individual rights, fraternity involves cooperative collective action to address common problems. More than tolerating each other, fraternity involves understanding each other's different needs and supporting each other's diverse goals.

¹⁸M. Scott Peck, *The Different Drum* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), pp. 59-76.

¹⁹Bernard Crick suggests that these attitudes of "fraternity" may be most evident, paradoxically, in the "sisterhood" of the women's movement. See his *Socialism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), pp. 102-103.

The development of more fraternal attitudes and cooperative behavior should not occur at the expense of individuality. Socialists believe that liberals have overemphasized the conflict between individuality and communal harmony. Achieving a sense of community and seeking common goals through cooperative action does not require that individuality be suppressed or that freedoms be reduced. Individual differences, with respect both to capabilities and to goals, are inevitable and desirable. Nothing can be gained by lamenting such individual differences and inequalities, and attempts to erase our individual differences would be both futile and monstrous.²⁰ Rather than aiming to suppress individuality, socialists want to stimulate the full blossoming of individuality, because they believe that individual differences are the source of social energy. Economic productivity and social progress can be maximized if everyone is allowed to utilize his or her particular capacities and strengths and to express his or her goals and understandings in an uninhibited and free manner. But liberal societies have not adequately removed the barriers to the full expression of individuality and to the maximization of individual freedom.

Socialists believe that the liberal concern with individual liberty should be extended in three ways. First, socialists want to increase the *range* of concrete freedom by extending the number of situations in which individuals have real choices among alternatives. For example, they believe that the abstract economic liberties and property rights emphasized by liberals do not ensure that people have a genuine choice to quit demeaning or exploitative jobs given that they may need the income to support their families. People cannot really choose to have beneficial medical treatments if they cannot afford them. Thus, socialists want to reduce the situations in which people cannot make choices that improve their well-being because of economic, social, or political constraints. Second, socialists want to increase the *domain* of freedom by extending freedom beyond the private realm to the public realm. Socialists agree with liberals that individuals should be free in choosing to do those private acts that don't affect others, but they believe that the liberal emphasis on liberty in the private realm gives insufficient attention to liberty in the public realm. They believe that individuals become more free when they are part of a public that makes public choices about their collective lives. For example, if a community is threatened by the decision of a private corporation to shut down a local plant and relocate it elsewhere, socialists believe that the affected citizens and workers should be able to make a public policy choice regarding the matter, for if corporate managers and owners can impose such decisions on people, the people are fundamentally unfree. Third, socialists want to increase the *scope* of freedom, extending the real choices that are available in both private and public life to as many people as possible. They believe that liberals place too great an emphasis on formal equal freedoms and ignore the fact that many people are nevertheless constrained by social barriers and economic inequalities from

²⁰For a wonderful satire on attempts to erase human differences, see Kurt Vonnegut's "Harrison Bergeron" in *Welcome to the Monkey House* (New York: Dell, 1970).

making real choices. For example, even the presence of affirmative action programs and scholarships for the economically disadvantaged do not permit most blacks, women, and poor people to choose to enter a professional educational program and occupation, because their upbringing has left them unqualified. Public action to improve the social, economic, and cultural context in which all people are raised can allow individuals with natural ability to become qualified, and thus turn decisions about who can enter such professions into a matter of individual choice.

Socialists believe that extending individual freedom and developing communal harmony are, for the most part, compatible goals. When a genuine community exists, everyone encourages others to develop fully their unique capabilities so that they can most effectively contribute to the community. Nevertheless, socialists also recognize the liberal idea that there are some tensions between individuality and community. For example, individuals who pursue undisciplined and addictive lifestyles can be disruptive to the community. In such circumstances, the claims of individuality and those of social harmony must be balanced. Socialists also recognize that the liberties of some people will compete with the liberties of other people. For example, giving individual capitalists unlimited property rights undermines the freedoms of those whose lives are affected by how the property is employed. In such circumstances, the greater economic liberties of a few must be balanced with a more equal distribution of liberty.²¹

Thus, socialists want a more egalitarian society. For socialists, liberals have a weak conception of equality, since they are content when everyone has equal opportunities to achieve their individual goals. While agreeing that equal opportunity is important, socialists want to go beyond equal opportunity and attain more equal social and economic conditions for all. However, the socialist goal of an egalitarian society is nothing so simple as one having an equal distribution of all social and economic goods. Instead, an egalitarian society is one in which everyone is given equal respect as an individual and equal membership in the political community. As people acquire more respect for each other, they will make less-pronounced distinctions regarding the status of people, thereby reducing social inequality. As people deepen their sense of equal membership in political communities, they will identify their common material needs and provide certain necessities to everyone as basic entitlements, thereby reducing economic inequality. And as both equal respect and the sense of equal membership deepen, people will begin to question the legitimacy of extensive inequalities in political power. Socialists recognize that, because of their superior individual virtues and contributions to the community, some people will be more honored than others. Socialists also recognize that, because of their greater industriousness and skill, some people will be richer than others. And socialists recognize that, because of their greater leadership capacities and political interests, some people will acquire more power than others. The socialist goal is not to eliminate such inequalities, but to reduce them and

²¹Crick, *Socialism*, pp. 87-88.

make them more compatible with genuine community and extensive freedom for everyone. We will further develop the socialist goal of an egalitarian society in the section on justice, below.

Socialists also value political democracy. They believe that liberals—being satisfied with prevailing institutions of representative democracy—have a “thin” conception of democracy. While socialists disagree with the Marxist claim that representative democracy is completely dominated by capitalism, they believe that capitalists have disproportionate influence in representative institutions, and they want these institutions to be more responsive to the interests and needs of common people. While socialists agree with liberals that representative democracy is important, they believe that the institutions of such a system must be augmented with additional opportunities for citizen participation in decision making. We will further develop the socialist goal of augmenting representative democracy with participatory democracy in the section on rulers, below.

In summary, socialists believe that liberal values regarding fraternity, freedom, equality, and democracy can be given interpretations that transcend their liberal limitations. Fraternity involves more than tolerance; it demands genuine mutual respect and caring. Liberty involves more than formal political, economic, and social rights; it requires that everyone have genuine choices in as many situations as possible. Equality involves more than equal opportunity; it entails the reduction of existing inequalities in the distribution of social goods. And true democracy consists of more than just ensuring representative democracy; it requires broad citizen participation. Such socialist values can occasionally compete with each other, requiring that they be balanced. But socialists argue that these values are usually compatible with each other and that their realization will lead to the universal human values of peace and prosperity. Cooperating with each other involves supporting the individual strengths of others and promoting their individual freedoms. A regard for everyone’s individuality and freedoms promotes a concern for inequalities in the distribution of social goods. Democratic participation provides opportunities for cooperation, for extending everyone’s real liberties, and for reducing illegitimate inequalities. When people live within this cycle of compatible values, the sources of human friction—egotism, repression, injustice, and domination—can be eliminated, and conflict can be replaced by peace. And when people are motivated by these socialist values, the problem of scarcity can be solved by unleashing human energies that are currently restrained by alienation, poverty, and exploitation and by redirecting human energies away from unproductive competition and destructive conflicts.

While most socialists would accept this description of their fundamental goals, it must be augmented in two important ways. First, socialists understand that, beyond focusing on such value transformations, it is also important to articulate more concrete goals. Socialism is an ideology that wants to maximize public support so that socialist parties and candidates can win democratic elections. Thus, socialists propose a variety of specific measures—for example, increasing wages, shortening the work week, and making safer

working conditions—that improve people’s lives.²² Second, socialists understand that their concrete goals and abstract values must continue to evolve. For example, Swedish Socialists are now focusing on two “new” goals for the twenty-first century.²³ While socialists have not previously been especially ecologically sensitive, there is an increasing realization that one of the foremost problems that must be resolved by cooperative action is the preservation of the natural environment. And while socialists have always been concerned with reducing the alienating aspects of work, they are now giving more attention to how work can be transformed into a genuinely pleasant aspect of life. “Quality work”—work that is cooperative and varied and results in products that are beautiful and enduring—may be just one of several emerging goals of socialism.

SUBSTANTIVE POLITICAL PRINCIPLES

Change

Although there is much overlap among Marxists, communists, and democratic socialists in their political bases—especially in their disdain for capitalism—democratic socialists depart from Marxists and communists in their principles regarding political change. While communists advocate revolutionary political change involving widespread rebellion by the working class, the seizure of political power by the dictatorship of the proletariat, and the sudden and forceful abolition of capitalism, socialists advocate evolutionary political change involving a broad transformation of values of all citizens, electoral victory by socialist and labor parties, and the adoption of political reforms and progressive public policies that tame the excesses of capitalism.

Eduard Bernstein provided several reasons for the socialist preference for evolutionary change over revolutionary change. First, Bernstein recognized that the objective conditions that Marx thought were necessary for a spontaneous revolution were nowhere in sight. European capitalism at the turn of the twentieth century was not about to collapse. Rather than producing massive unemployment, capitalism had created more jobs, as it became more diversified and specialized. Rather than impoverishing the working class, capitalism had produced a rapid rise in real wages. Rather than engaging in ruthless competition leading to the failure of many enterprises, capitalists had learned to cooperate among themselves and to regulate competition through the development of cartels, trusts, and joint-stock companies. And perhaps most importantly, the ownership of capital had become more diffused rather than more concentrated. All of these trends suggested that capitalism was

²²Such “materialistic goals” have always been controversial within socialism, however, because some socialists believe that a focus on these practical issues will divert attention from socialism’s more fundamental values and, thus, reduce socialism to “egalitarian liberalism.”

²³Barkan, “Sweden: Not Yet Paradise, But . . .”, p. 151.

developing more harmoniously than had been predicted by Marx. Contemporary socialists agree that, instead of collapsing, capitalism has developed numerous mechanisms for averting an economic, social, and political crisis.

Second, Bernstein argued that the subjective conditions for a communist revolution were likewise fading. He argued that the working class was not becoming larger and more unified. It was not developing a "class consciousness" of its exploitation and alienation under capitalism, nor was it developing a commitment to revolutionary change. Contemporary socialists agree that the class structure of capitalism has become complex, diminishing revolutionary consciousness. Rather than being composed primarily of a small exploiting class of property-owning capitalists and a large exploited class of propertyless proletariat, mature capitalist societies have seen the evolution of several intermediate classes (e.g., the people who manage but do not own economic enterprises; white-collar salaried professionals like engineers, teachers, and civil servants; a "labor aristocracy" of highly skilled blue-collar workers who command high wages in the labor marketplace). Members of such classes are politically prominent but do not identify with the conditions and the revolutionary aims of the proletariat. However, such classes can support socialist organizations that merely hope to tame the excesses of capitalism and promote socialist values.

Third, Bernstein argued that Western industrial societies had become democratized in various ways—such as extending the vote to those without property—that facilitated the acquisition of power by socialist parties and their use of state authority to regulate capitalism, to exercise public control over property, and to distribute goods more fairly. Contemporary socialists point to continuing democratization throughout the world²⁴ and to the successful implementation of many socialist policies²⁵ to show that progress toward democracy can result in governmental reforms of capitalism and the evolution of the economy and society toward socialism.

Socialists also question whether revolutions actually produce enduring progressive change.²⁶ The French Revolution suggested to the Fabians and Revisionists that revolutions, although perhaps initiated in pursuit of noble ideals, inevitably become oppressive, as revolutionary leaders turn to coercion and violence to solidify their hold on power and to pursue their programs despite resistant populations. The Stalinist era following the Russian Revolution gave subsequent socialists additional evidence of the failures of revolutionaries to achieve their goals.

For socialists, reform can be much more enduring than revolutionary change. Sidney Webb argued that enduring change should be organic; it could

²⁴Francisco Weffort, "The Future of Socialism," *Journal of Democracy* 3 (July 1992), pp. 90–99.

²⁵Arnold J. Heidenheimer, Hugh Hecllo, and Carolyn Teich Adams, *Comparative Public Policy*, 3d ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990).

²⁶A landmark analysis of the repressive aftermath of revolutions remains Albert Camus's *The Rebel* (New York: Vintage Books, 1953).

not be imposed upon a society but must result from internal processes within society. Organic change had to be

(1) Democratic, and thus acceptable to a majority of the people and prepared for in the minds of all; (2) gradual, and thus causing no dislocation, however rapid may be the rate of progress; (3) not regarded as immoral by the mass of people, and thus not subjectively demoralizing to them; and in this country, at any rate; (4) constitutional and peaceful.²⁷

Recently, Bernard Crick has identified three time frames in the process of organic and evolutionary change. In the short run—which is the life of an existing administration or legislature—socialists must address immediate and particular abuses in the capitalist system and provide specific material benefits for citizens in order to build a political base for future socialist movements. Looking ahead twenty to twenty-five years, to the middle term, socialists must seek to change the enduring values of the next generation by demonstrating the deficiencies of existing institutions (such as private education and medicine) and the effectiveness and fairness of socialist practices (such as worker participation in corporate decision making). The long run, which is in the indefinite and faraway future, concerns the ideal socialist society. Socialists are little concerned with the achievement of a utopian final resting point, a time when socialism is achieved. They know that history is but a “long march” toward socialist ideals that will never be fully realized. Still, it is useful for socialists to refine and assert visions of a future ideal socialist society—not in a dogmatic manner but rather in a speculative manner—so that discussions of the good society are not limited to prevailing (liberal and conservative) values.²⁸ Such idealizations serve as reminders that socialism does not yet exist—even in those societies that have used democratic means to nationalize major industries or to create extensive welfare states. The limitations of such “socialist” institutions and policies ensure that they are only transitional stages in the slow and steady change toward the more full attainment of socialism.²⁹

Finally, we should note that socialists—unlike Marxists—do not believe in the inevitability of the realization of socialist values or even of progress toward them. All that is inevitable is that the future will bring radical change. Capitalism, technology, and science—“our microbiology, phototonics, and superconductors”—are creating “epochal transformations of the very conditions of human life.”³⁰ Such transformations could be regressive—promoting isolated individualism, reducing real freedom, increasing inequality, and being ultimately directed by a small number of political elites. Or such transformations could be progressive—leading toward socialist values. The task of socialist ideology is to clarify its principles in such a way as to inspire people to take as many small steps as they can down the road to socialism.

²⁷Sidney Webb, *Socialism in England* (1890), quoted in Crick, *Socialism*, p. 68.

²⁸Crick, *Socialism*, p. 113.

²⁹Irving Howe, “The First 35 Years Were the Hardest,” *Dissent* (spring 1989), p. 136.

³⁰Michael Harrington, “Toward a New Socialism,” *Dissent* (spring 1989), p. 163.

Structure

Being reformers, socialists are willing to move down the road to socialism using the political institutions that already exist within a given society. Constitutional and institutional arrangements that incorporate political rights and democratic principles offer socialists opportunities to pursue their values, win public support, and govern. Thus, rather than proposing fundamental constitutional changes, socialists focus on strengthening those existing institutions that facilitate the attainment of their goals. Hence, socialists want to enhance the role of political parties both in elections and in governance, because strong parties—especially strong socialist and labor parties—help organize and empower those with fewer economic resources. Socialists want to enhance the power of labor unions as an important countervailing force to corporate power in industry. In circumstances in which conservative and corporate interests are entrenched in state institutions, socialists may make proposals for “restructuring” and reorganization, but such proposals are limited and ad hoc. Because there are no clear socialist principles on how to structure government,³¹ socialist proposals for institutional reform are, of necessity, opportunistic. Within contexts of particular problems and opportunities, socialists simply hope to make modest reforms in government structures that will allow working people to participate more readily in government and that seem likely to enhance the power of workers.

Rather than focusing on how to structure government, socialist theorists have focused on how to structure the broader political economy, but there is much disagreement here. On the one hand, centralists emphasize strong and disciplined political parties that control a strong state that owns most of the means of production and distributes many economic goods. On the other hand, decentralists emphasize face-to-face institutional arrangements in which political and economic power is dispersed among such organizations as industrial cooperatives, trade organizations and unions, local communities, and grassroots social movements. The term **market socialism** is often used to designate a mixed political economy having both the strong state institutions emphasized by centralists and the market institutions that are emphasized by decentralists.³² Under market socialism, goods and services can be produced through at least six types of institutional arrangements:³³

1. In **nationalized enterprises**, a centralized government owns the means of production, employs labor, and controls most decision making.
2. In **socialized enterprises**, the means of production are owned by various governments (and thus by the citizens of these governments) and these enterprises are accountable to the governments that own them. However,

³¹Crick, *Socialism*, p. 80.

³²For a defense of market socialism, see John Roemer, *A Future for Socialism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994).

³³The following discussion draws extensively from Alex Nove, *The Economics of Feasible Socialism Revisited* (London: HarperCollins Academic, 1991), pp. 212–225.

workers of the plant directly or indirectly control most decision making and employ management to administer the enterprise. While nationalized enterprises normally have monopolistic control of a particular industry in a country, many socialized enterprises can compete with each other, developing different methods of production and product variations.

3. In **cooperatives**, the workforce owns the means of production and controls most decision making, subject to the regulations of various governments having jurisdiction over them.
4. In *private enterprise*, the means of production are owned by private stockholders and controlled by managers who are formally accountable to their stockholders and constrained by the agreements they make with other organizations (such as labor unions) and the regulations of those governments having jurisdiction over them.
5. In **worker-controlled private enterprises**, the means of production are owned by stockholders, but workers (and various affected publics) control decision making—either directly, or by selecting their managers, who are accountable to them.
6. In *individual entrepreneurial activity*, such unaffiliated persons as freelance writers, painters, and shopkeepers themselves own and control all the resources used in their businesses.

A political economy having some mix of these productive arrangements has many “market” characteristics. Many corporations are privately owned. The managers of the various types of enterprises must secure their resources in competitive markets; for example, even nationalized enterprises must attract workers from a labor market in which workers can try to secure higher wages and other benefits from the managers of other enterprises. Except for nationalized enterprises with monopoly control of their markets, enterprises must price their goods in ways that are competitive with those of other, similar enterprises (and even nationalized monopolies may have to consider international competition when setting prices). There is, for the most part, freedom of entry and exit throughout an economy of market socialism. Successful enterprises will encourage others to invest in the area, and unsuccessful enterprises will fail. Thus, market socialism encourages productivity and innovation.

This mix of productive arrangements also has many “public” characteristics. There is public ownership of some enterprises, especially those—like railroads and utilities—that are natural monopolies. The public can invest in certain industries by creating nationalized and socialized enterprises, and it can influence investment decisions elsewhere by having the state control credit and provide various financial incentives and disincentives for private investors. And the state can regulate production through labor, safety, environmental, trade, and other types of legislation.

In short, market socialism recognizes and exploits the benefits of economic markets. But extensive state participation in the political economy through public planning, regulation, and (at least occasional) ownership tempers competition and secures various public objectives.

Market socialism also has a mix of distributive organizational arrangements:

1. Individuals and organizations distribute commodities to other individuals and organizations based on the market principle of free exchange.
2. State agencies distribute many necessities to (potentially) everyone, as citizen rights.
3. Helping societies distribute some necessities and commodities to the poor, as mutual aid.

When thinking about distributive arrangements, socialists distinguish between commodities and necessities. "Commodities" are those goods (like luxury homes) and those services (like tennis lessons) that people often *want* but do not require. Socialists understand that people want a wide range of commodities, that such commodities are most efficiently distributed by the market, and that "market morality is a celebration of wanting, making, owning, and exchanging commodities."³⁴ In contrast, "necessities" are those goods (like minimal nutrition and basic housing) and those services (like police protection and essential medical care) that everyone needs in order to survive, to engage successfully in the pursuit of happiness, and to be free and contributing members of society.³⁵ Socialists with centralist perspectives have long maintained that necessities ought to be distributed by state agencies, because all citizens have a right to necessities, even if they cannot afford them in the marketplace. Such *nationalized distributions* are provided by state agencies that are merely acting as agents of the citizens of a nation, who are committed to providing for each other's essential needs and paying for these provisions through taxes. But socialists having more decentralist perspectives worry that the role played by state agencies in providing nationalized distributions undermines fraternal values; such distributions of necessities may be seen as "bureaucrats spending taxpayers' money" rather than as mutual aid. These socialists want to augment nationalized distributions with *socialized distributions*—which is aid to needy individuals provided directly by citizens through helping societies, rather than through the state. Helping societies are composed of citizens who, rather than being taxed on an involuntary basis to pay for assistance to others, give of their time, energy, and money on a voluntary and personal (face-to-face) basis.³⁶ Nevertheless, nationalized distributions—more than nationalized production—remain essential features of market socialism. To understand further the role of the state in a socialist political economy, we must consider socialist principles about governmental authority.

³⁴Walzer, *Spheres of Justice* pp. 104–105.

³⁵Mortimer Adler, *Six Great Ideas* (New York: Macmillan, 1981), pp. 164–173.

³⁶This discussion of nationalized versus socialized distributions is drawn from Michael Walzer's "Socializing the Welfare State: Democracy in the Distributive Sector," *Dissent* (summer 1988), pp. 292–300. Walzer points out that helping societies should not be confused with more conservative philanthropic organizations that provide aid as charity. Conservative charities, like the United Way, are typically more bureaucratic and impersonal than socialist helping societies.

Authority

Like contemporary liberals, democratic socialists endorse a strong state; they believe that governmental authority should be expanded, as necessary, to deal with a variety of social problems. But socialists think that liberal governments usually fail to use their authority to attack the roots—or ultimate sources—of social problems, which lie in the capitalist system of production and distribution.

Consider, for example, the problem of crime. Liberals believe that crime is primarily caused by society's failure to provide poor and minority youths with adequate opportunities for social and economic advancement. Liberal governments thus hope to attack crime by using their authority to unblock opportunities—by improving education, providing job training, and so forth. In contrast, socialists believe that crime is inherent to capitalism. To ensure an adequate market for its products, capitalists stimulate acquisitive, materialistic appetites in all citizens, but the inequalities in wealth produced by capitalism leave the poor unable to satisfy these appetites through legal means. From a socialist perspective, crime can best be reduced by having government con-

Sidebar 9-2

The Socialist Perspective on Schools

It is instructive to contrast liberal and socialist perspectives on problems in education. An important educational problem for contemporary liberals occurs when rich white children attend better public schools than poor black ones do. In response, liberals in the United States have used governmental authority to desegregate schools, to equalize per-pupil expenditures among wealthy and poor school districts throughout a state, and to create special programs like Headstart and Upward Bound to help poor children catch up with their peers. While socialists do not reject such liberal approaches to educational problems, they believe they do not go far enough. The more fundamental problem is that the schools have not escaped capitalist domination. Socialists believe that schools teach the values and beliefs of conservative and liberal ideologies and mold children to accept passive roles in the prevailing

political and economic systems. In the socialist perspective, the primary function of most schools in capitalist societies is to sort and label students, a process that ensures that the most advantaged children will be directed toward professional and managerial careers while the least advantaged children will be trained to perform and accept low-paying, unfulfilling jobs. For socialists, this educational problem can only be addressed by making schools completely autonomous from the existing political economy. Schools must enable students to be free and equal citizens of a democratic society instead of learning to be passive and unequal workers in a capitalist economy. To do this, governmental authority must be used to finance an equal basic education for all children in public schools and to protect such schools from pressure to use the curriculum as a means of advancing the goals of capitalism.

trol the ability of capitalism to generate excessive demands for its products (for example, by limiting advertising) and by redistributing wealth so that the poor have more resources with which to acquire goods legally.³⁷

Because socialists believe that government authority should address various social problems and because they believe that such problems are ultimately rooted in capitalism, our discussion of socialist principles regarding governmental authority will focus on the role of government in producing and distributing economic goods. This discussion is complicated, however, by the fact that socialists agree only on the ends or purposes of governmental authority in the economy—they want government to curtail capitalist domination, to temper the spirit of competition with one of cooperation, to enhance real economic freedom, and to promote more equality. Socialists often disagree on whether specific governmental policies are likely to achieve these goals.

The founders of democratic socialism—the Revisionists and the Fabians—focused on economic production and supported the **nationalization of industry**. They wanted the state to own and manage most industries and thus employ most workers. They believed nationalization would promote communal harmony, as production could be based on rational assessments of social needs rather than on the basis of market competition. Nationalization would promote real freedom, because workers would no longer be dominated by private owners of the means of production. And nationalization would promote social equality because class distinctions between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat (and other classes or subclasses) would disappear when everyone worked for the state, and because the state could establish more equal wages than those that could be offered under capitalism.

For such reasons, many socialist parties, upon coming to power, have nationalized specific industries. For example, in Great Britain after World War II, the Labour Party nationalized the coal mines, the railroads, the utilities, and the iron and steel industries. In France in the early 1980s, the Socialist Party under François Mitterand nationalized almost all private banks, steel producers, a major armaments firm, and several multinational corporations. The Swedish Socialist Party (SAP) has created Statsforetag AB ("State Enterprise Ltd.") as a conglomerate of publicly owned industries, but Statsforetag accounts for only about five percent of Swedish productivity. Notice that in each of these cases nationalization has been limited to specific industries—particularly to those in which there were natural monopolies and extensive inefficiencies and where national priorities justified extensive investments by the national governments.

Wholesale nationalization of all private industry has never been seriously contemplated by socialists, for a variety of reasons. An initial constraint on large-scale nationalization is the cost of acquiring private enterprises. While communist regimes have been willing to confiscate private property by forceful means, socialist governments understand that capitalists are constitutionally and legally protected from confiscation of their property. Liberal laws

³⁷Richard Quinney, *Criminology* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1979).

specify that the government can only acquire private property when such acquisitions serve compelling public purposes and when the owners of the property are fairly compensated. Providing just compensation to the owners of all private property is far beyond the means of any democratic government. Thus, socialists have had to be selective in choosing which industries they wish to purchase and manage.

In general, socialists have often concluded that nationalization of industry does not significantly enhance the achievement of socialist goals. Nationalized firms may have to compete with many other companies in an international marketplace, leading state authorities to treat workers in nationalized firms much like corporate managers of private companies treat their workers. As a result, there may be no greater degree of communal harmony, worker freedom, or economic equality in nationalized industries than exists in private ones. For example, nationalized firms in democratic societies have encountered two huge obstacles to promoting equality in wealth and income. First, the need to compensate the previous owners of private industries means that the actual act of nationalizing an industry results in little real change in the distribution of wealth. Second, the need to recruit skilled workers requires state authorities to base worker wages on market considerations. A petroleum engineer will command higher wages than a person who pumps gas at the local filling station, whether the employer is a nationalized firm like British Petroleum or a private firm like Amoco Oil.

Because of such difficulties, socialists have recently de-emphasized state ownership of the means of production and, instead, emphasized public control over economic production through **state planning**. Socialists differentiate three main levels of state planning: (1) comprehensive planning, as practiced by communists in the former Soviet Union, (2) partial socialist planning, as practiced by social democratic parties in Western Europe since World War II, and (3) minimal macroeconomic planning, as practiced by liberal governments in the United States. Socialists perceive many problems with comprehensive planning, in which central state authorities make all investment and production decisions for the economy: central planning promotes authoritarianism and discourages local initiatives; central planners are limited by inevitably imperfect foresight as they seek to predict changes in human tastes and technology; central planners focus on quantitative indicators of production performance, giving inadequate attention to the quality of goods produced; and central planners focus on achieving specified (minimal) goals, rather than taking risks that accompany innovation.³⁸ Such problems prompt socialists to reject comprehensive, or central, planning. In contrast, socialists accept the macroeconomic planning of the liberal state. Like liberals, socialists believe that governments should monitor the economy as a whole and introduce fiscal and monetary policies that stimulate stable growth, but socialists believe that governments should provide more explicit direction to, and extensive controls over, the economy than can be achieved by macroeconomic planning.

Socialists thus endorse a level of state planning that is intermediate in rela-

³⁸Nove, *The Economics of Feasible Socialism Revisited*, pp. 73–85.

tion to comprehensive planning and macroeconomic planning. Under such partial socialist planning, the state normally directs and controls the economy in several ways.

First, planners project needs and preferences throughout the economy. To prevent bottlenecks in the production process—to avoid situations, for example, where production must slow down or cease because of inadequate energy supplies—state planners estimate the quantities of various resources (e.g., raw materials, component parts, and labor) that are necessary for production and develop plans to ensure their availability.

Second, the state controls major investment decisions, deciding where to build new plants and install new equipment in nationalized industries and influencing major private investments through control of banking and financing. The state determines those sectors of the economy that warrant new investments and those sectors that are no longer productive and successful, and thus require disinvestment.

Third, state planners monitor salaries, wages, and other compensation, establishing equitable compensation guidelines that reduce the huge and unjustified inequalities of an unregulated labor market.

Fourth, socialist planners seek to ensure job security for workers. However, rather than providing state subsidies to unproductive and failing industries to save jobs, the socialist state pursues job security by creating labor laws that protect workers from arbitrary dismissals and by facilitating worker mobility to more productive industries. For example, it provides vocational counseling, job retraining, job placement, and relocation subsidies for unemployed workers.

Fifth, the state monitors and regulates the products of both public and private enterprises. To protect consumer interests, it restrains excessive prices, it tests for the safety and reliability of goods, and it requires that companies adequately warrant and service their products. To guard against wasteful production and inefficiencies, it regulates such practices as pseudo product differentiation, garish packaging, and motivational rather than informative advertising.

Sixth, the state pursues foreign policy agreements that promote and secure the long-term economic interests of society. For example, the state may negotiate commodity agreements with other nations as a means of ensuring international markets for various goods for many years. Additionally, the socialist state is likely to seek cooperative agreements with underdeveloped nations that curtail the domination of northern countries over southern ones and that enhance global socialism. By providing international aid that transfers capital and technology to the southern hemisphere, socialists hope to reduce north-south hostilities, curtail such environmental problems as the deteriorating ozone layer and global warming, and enable southern nations to be prosperous consumers of northern products.³⁹

Seventh, the state oversees the production of those goods that are distributed to citizens as rights. Most goods that are distributed to citizens as enti-

³⁹Harrington, "Toward a New Socialism," p. 159–160.

lements will be produced by the state. For example, public education and socialized medicine are publicly owned and controlled institutions, and teachers and doctors are employees of the state. Although socialists may allow certain entitlements to be produced by private firms—which are paid with public funds—they generally prefer state production of entitlements as the most effective way of ensuring adherence to state plans and goals, including the equal provision of entitlements to everyone.

The theoretical justification for extensive state planning rests on two related distinctions. First is the distinction between wants and needs. According to socialists, an unplanned, or market, system of production does a good job of responding to individual wants or preferences, but it does not do a good job of producing goods that respond to collective needs. When individuals want goods and can afford them, consumer demands are created that producers are motivated to satisfy by natural market forces, but some goods are needed by society as a whole or by individuals who are unable to pay for them. Socialist planning is needed to produce such goods. Second is the distinction between the short term and the long term. According to socialists, an unplanned economy responds well to short-term interests and forces but does not respond well to long-term interests and forces. The time horizons of producers, workers, and consumers are usually restricted. Enterprises are more concerned with short-term profits than long-term productivity. Workers are more concerned with annual wages than with the quality of their lives in the distant future. Consumers want to satisfy immediate gratifications rather than worry about tomorrow. State planners can better balance short-run goals with long-run goals than can actors in an unplanned and unregulated market. State planning to protect the environment, to enhance the education of all citizens, or to engage in research and development that can lead to cures of various illnesses are just some of the ways that state authority is used by socialists to give greater emphasis to long-term needs over short-term wants.

Socialists also claim that there is ample empirical evidence suggesting that socialist planning of the economy is superior to an unplanned economy. According to one socialist:

The growth of the West European economies after 1945, with more extensive planning and much greater state intervention, was more rapid and stable than in any other period of modern history. . . . In the European socialist countries, the rate of growth was even higher, and in the face of great difficulties, most of these countries developed with remarkable speed the essential foundations of an advanced industrial society. . . . The success of planning may also be judged from the other side by observing that the two least-planned capitalist societies—Britain and the United States—are those which at present confront the greatest economic difficulties and show most clearly the symptoms of decline.⁴⁰

Most socialists thus continue to favor an extensive role for government in the production of goods and services, but they put even greater emphasis, at least in recent years, on expanding the role of government in the distribution

⁴⁰Tom B. Bottomore, *The Socialist Economy* (New York: Guilford Press, 1990), p. 48.

of goods and services. Socialists understand that most commodities—the goods that people prefer but don't need—should be distributed by the market. But socialists want the state to distribute as universal entitlements those goods that all need but are often unable to afford. While contemporary liberals also call for the state to distribute some goods as entitlements, the **social welfare state** is more expansive than the liberal welfare state in two respects. First, socialists think that people's needs are much more extensive than do liberals. Second, while liberals focus on the needs of the poor and the oppressed and often target entitlements to specific groups, socialists stress that certain needs are universal and thus claim that entitlements must be provided to everyone.

As one moves from classical liberalism to contemporary liberalism and then to socialism, there is a steady expansion of the concept of need and of the social contract to provide for needs. In classical liberalism, people are thought of as volitional beings—they are defined by their many wants and they are thought to have minimal needs. According to this ideology, people need the preservation of their natural individual rights (e.g., their right to own property), and the social contract is an agreement among citizens to form governmental authority that provides for the need of security. In contemporary liberalism, people are thought of as purposive beings—they want various kinds of lives, and certain goods (e.g., education, income, and power) are viewed as necessary means to the diverse ends that people want to pursue. According to this ideology, people need minimal amounts of these goods to have real opportunities to pursue their chosen lives, and the social contract is an agreement among citizens to have government provide baseline amounts of these goods. In socialism, people are considered to be social beings whose wants and needs are socially and culturally defined. According to this ideology, there is no particular list of goods that all people need. Instead, social, economic, and cultural conditions influence what people need in order to live individually fulfilling and socially productive lives within these conditions. In a socialist society, "the social contract is an agreement to reach decisions together about what goods are necessary to our common life, and then to provide those goods for one another."⁴¹

At least in an affluent and culturally sophisticated society, the goods that socialist citizens recognize as needed by everyone are likely to be much more extensive than those typically specified by liberals. Like classical liberals, socialists recognize the need for police and military protection. Like contemporary liberals, socialists perceive the need for basic education and the provision of minimal food and shelter for everyone. But socialists usually further recognize that contemporary societies have generated a large array of additional needs that could and should be available to everyone but that lower-income citizens cannot afford in the market. Major advances in medical treatments and capabilities, for example, have resulted in new conceptions of people's health needs, prompting socialists to argue that health is a needed good that ought to be socially (or communally) provided rather than distrib-

⁴¹Walzer, *Spheres of Justice*, p. 65.

uted by the market.⁴² Vast changes in how cities are physically structured—with residential, industrial, and commercial areas often miles apart—have created new transportation needs, prompting socialists to call for the public provision of mass transport. Changes in family life and the economy have resulted in mothers joining fathers in the workplace, creating new needs in the areas of child care, prompting socialists to call for public day care facilities and family-leave policies allowing people to take time off work to deal with parental responsibilities. Such a list could be extended indefinitely, but there is no objective or natural list of human needs. Because all citizens have a reasonable understanding of what people need to thrive in their particular societies, an open, democratic process is the appropriate method of determining entitlements.

The socialist welfare state is also more universal than the liberal welfare state.⁴³ For socialists, socially recognized needs become **universal entitlements** that are provided to everyone based on their common citizenship rather than on some other criterion, such as destitution or prior contribution. Thus, the food stamp program in the United States is more consistent with liberal than socialist principles, because it provides for the nutritional needs of only those people living below the poverty level. Similarly, the Social Security program is more consistent with liberal than socialist principles, because it provides higher retirement payments to those who have made greater contributions to the program. In contrast, the fact that public schools are available to all children make them a universal and socialist entitlement. Socialized medicine provides specified medical care to all citizens regardless of how wealthy they are or how much (or little) they pay in taxes, unlike the market-based system in the United States. While liberals propose subsidies to poor families for child care, socialists argue that day care centers are a universal need and should be available to all families.

By targeting the poor for entitlements, it may appear that liberal welfare policies are more likely than social welfare policies to equalize conditions, which seems odd, because socialists value equality more than liberals. But socialists defend universal entitlements on a number of grounds. First, universal entitlements recognize the common needs that people have in response to their common problems. Wealthy working mothers as well as poor working mothers need quality day care. By providing universal entitlements, everyone makes a commitment to each other to provide for their common needs. Second, socialists view universal entitlements as an important antidote to middle- and upper-class hostility toward the liberal welfare state. The relatively well-off may view means-tested entitlements as redistributive, prompting

⁴²Rashi Fein, "National Health Insurance," *Dissent* (spring 1992), pp. 157–163.

⁴³Discussions of the importance of universal social provisions are found in William Julius Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 149–164; and Margaret Weir, Ann Schola Orloff, and Theda Skocpol, *The Politics of Social Policy in the United States* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), pp. 441–445. Skocpol links proposals for universal programs to democratic socialism in "Legacies of New Deal Liberalism," in *Liberalism Reconsidered*, edited by Douglas MacLean and Claudia Mills (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Allenheld, 1983), p. 102–103.

them to resent paying higher taxes for welfare benefits targeted toward those who, they believe, contribute little to society. Because universal entitlements benefit everyone, they help generate support for the welfare state, enhancing its long-term viability and prospects for expansion. Third, socialists believe that even universal entitlements promote equality of condition. While everyone may equally consume universal entitlements, such provisions constitute a relatively large share of all goods available to the poor and a relatively small share of all goods available to the rich. Thus, such entitlements provide a much greater increase in the quality of life of the poor than of the rich. Moreover, universal entitlements are normally paid for, in socialist states, by highly progressive taxes. Because the rich pay much more of the costs of entitlements than do the poor, the new social provisions lessen economic inequalities between the rich and the poor.

Most socialists regard nationalized distributions as being more successful than nationalized production.⁴⁴ By prompting people to recognize their common needs, the social welfare state promotes communal harmony. By making welfare a citizen right, it decreases the dependency of the poor on charity and thus increases their freedom. By linking the availability of some goods to equal citizenship rather than to unequal wealth, it fosters equality. But some socialists question the success of the social welfare state. Is communal harmony and fraternal fellow feeling better achieved by a fairly abstract social contract administered by the national government or by people coming to the aid of their neighbors? Are recipients of national welfare really free—or do they remain dependent on the state, incapable of shaping their own lives and of contributing to society?⁴⁵ Recognizing the limitations of the social welfare state, socialists regard it as one stage in the development of socialism and as only one element in the socialist program. Consequently, many socialists believe that the social welfare state must increasingly be complemented (and perhaps replaced) by helping associations in which people band together to contribute their time, energy, and resources to those with unmet needs. While such proposals have a distinctively “conservative” flavor, they well illustrate that the socialist commitment to a strong state is ultimately instrumental. It is not inherent in socialist ideology to seek a strong national government that controls many production and distribution decisions. Only commitment to socialist values is inherent in socialism, and socialist support of a strong state is dependent on the capacity of that state to promote social democratic values such as communal harmony, individual freedom, and social equality.

Justice

Socialists seek “social justice,” but they are reluctant to describe any particular distribution of economic and other social goods as just. It is clear to socialists that the distribution of wealth produced under capitalism is unjust or

⁴⁴Walzer, “Socializing the Welfare State,” pp. 293–294.

⁴⁵Walzer, “Socializing the Welfare State,” p. 294.

unfair. They recognize that many fortunes have been gained by exploiting others (and the environment), and they recognize that the poor have been victims of many forms of oppression. They argue that people's incomes bear little relationship to how hard they work, to their contribution to society, or to their moral merit.

One reason why capitalism fails to distribute goods fairly, according to socialists, is that liberalism provides a faulty principle of justice. For liberals, justice is achieved if inequalities occur under conditions in which everyone has an *equal opportunity* of winning competitive races to get greater shares of those goods being sought. Formal equal opportunity ensures that everyone faces equal "hurdles"; the hurdles for minorities, women, and the poor are no higher than those for whites, men, and the wealthy. Fair equal opportunity ensures that social policies have been implemented that compensate socially disadvantaged competitors in ways that bring them to the same "starting line" as their more advantaged competitors. Socialists realize that formal and fair equal opportunities are important because they make unequal human rewards reflect differences in individual choices and efforts rather than undeserved differences in natural attributes and in social circumstances. Nevertheless, socialists see several limitations with this conception of justice. Equal opportunity encourages people to be preoccupied with being more successful than others—with rising to the top of the pyramids of education, wealth, status, and power—rather than encouraging them to attain satisfaction by simply acquiring knowledge, engaging in challenging work, and so forth. It prompts people to view others as competitors to be surpassed or defeated in the pursuit of scarce goods, rather than as companions with whom one can cooperate to achieve common goals. Equal opportunity justifies the victories and losses that occur in this struggle for scarce goods. The winners think they have won a fair fight under conditions of equal opportunity, and they see themselves—and are often seen by others—as better people. Meanwhile, the losers think they have lost a fair fight, and they see themselves—and are seen often by others—as inferior people. Such beliefs are wrong, because the winners may have merely been more ruthless or just more lucky than the losers. Because of these limitations, socialists believe that there should be a conception of social justice that goes beyond equal opportunity.⁴⁶

For socialists, this more basic conception of justice is *not*—as is often believed—a simple **equality of condition**. Socialists recognize that a society in which everyone had absolutely equal amounts of education, wealth, power, or any other social good would be both undesirable and impossible. An equal distribution of any social good would restrict the liberty of those people who had the capacities and motivation to obtain more than the equal allotment. Unequal distributions of certain goods (such as advanced education for doctors and scientists or extensive political influence for elected officials) can benefit the public. Attempts to maintain equal distributions of such goods as wealth would necessitate a despotic government that continually meddled in

⁴⁶Schaar, "Equal Opportunity and Beyond."

individual lives. And even such governments would inevitably fail to achieve equal conditions:

We know that money equally distributed at twelve noon of a Sunday will have been unequally redistributed before the week is out. Some people will save it, and others will invest it, and still others will spend it (and they will do so in different ways).⁴⁷

Seeking a society that provides more than merely equal opportunity, yet shy of static equal conditions, socialists want an **egalitarian society**, "one in which everybody would see each other as sister and brother, of equal worth and potential."⁴⁸ Socialists try to put such moral sentiments into practice in several ways.

First, explanations and justifications for inequalities are sought and assessed for validity. Inequalities reflecting individual choices and efforts are usually regarded as acceptable; discovering the legitimate bases for such inequalities helps reduce the social friction that they might otherwise spark. Inequalities arising from undeserved differences in social circumstances, however, are criticized, and public policies are sought to reduce such inequalities.⁴⁹

Second, efforts are made to reduce inequalities in wealth, power, and other goods, even though legitimate and marginal differences in such goods remain. For example, material conditions are made more equal by collecting inheritance taxes and using the revenue from such taxes to provide more entitlements. Incomes can be made more equal by pursuing solidaristic wage policies providing equal pay for equivalent work across various industries nationwide.⁵⁰ Political power is made more equal through policies that encourage the organization and participation of groups of disadvantaged citizens.

Third, efforts can be made to contain deleterious effects of unequal distributions. Laws can block certain uses of money that permit the wealthy to have excessive options and opportunities that are unavailable to the less well-off.⁵¹ For example, the capacity of money to buy better or more extensive education for the children of the rich could be reduced. Constitutional limitations and ethics laws can regulate the performance of public officials, constraining their ability to convert political power to personal gain.

Fourth, efforts could be made to make inequalities less permanent. For example, rather than giving some professors endowed chairs for the rest of their careers, economic bonuses and honors could be rotated among deserving professors on an annual (or other periodic) basis.

Finally, noncumulative inequalities would be promoted by efforts to have

⁴⁷Walzer, *Spheres of Justice*, p. xi.

⁴⁸Crick, *Socialism*, p. 90

⁴⁹Determining what constitutes legitimate and illegitimate inequalities is a difficult problem that democratic socialists need to address more fully.

⁵⁰In this area, socialists need to solve the problem posed by the apparent incommensurability of various kinds of work. It is unclear, for example, whether the work of a farmer is equal to that of a factory worker.

⁵¹Walzer, *Spheres of Justice*, pp. 100–102.

those with high levels of one good receive lower levels of other goods. In this regard, severing the link between having wealth and acquiring political power—for example, by having public financing of political campaigns—would be particularly important. As another example, those with the most education and the most prestigious jobs would not necessarily be given the highest wages and the longest vacations.

These principles show that the socialist goal of egalitarianism is nothing so simple as the equal distribution of all goods. Instead, it is a desire to move toward a society in which everyone is respected as a human being, and in which no human being is treated as a means to the good of others. No particular distribution of goods would conform to socialist ideals. Instead, the precise characterization of social justice “would remain perpetually ambiguous, open, flexible, debatable, a moving horizon that is never quite reached, irreducible to either economic formula or legislative final solution.”⁵²

Rulers

The socialist commitment to egalitarianism leads directly to a much more populist interpretation of democracy than those expressed by other ideologies. While conservatives, liberals, and Marxists support certain types of democracy, they also concentrate power in a ruling class that is considered to be more competent than ordinary citizens. But socialists believe that the ends of politics—communal harmony, individual freedom, and social justice—are not complex ideals, known only by an elite few. Instead, socialists believe that, potentially, everyone has the wisdom to grasp these ideals, the moral virtue to be guided by them, and the intelligence to make reasonable judgments about the particular policies and arrangements that will move society closer to the realization of these ideals.⁵³ Of course, socialists recognize that not everyone is guided by these ideals. Traditional prejudices and the material competitiveness of capitalism have hindered acceptance of socialist ideals among citizens. Socialists thus believe that democracy is an ideal that can be approached but never fully realized.

Rudimentary forms and institutions of democracy emergent in the nineteenth century encouraged socialists to believe that socialism could be pursued by democratic means. For example, the Fabians recognized that the **Chartist movement**, which was particularly influential between 1837 and 1848, gave impetus to many electoral reforms in England—such as universal manhood suffrage, equal electoral districts, the secret ballot, the abolition of property qualifications for candidates to Parliament, and payment of members of Parliament—which made it possible for the working class to be better represented in Parliament and which prompted all representatives to be more responsive

⁵²Crick, *Socialism*, p. 90.

⁵³Rousseau's *Social Contract* provides an enduring vision of such democratic ideals, making Rousseau one of the favorite classical philosophers of democratic socialists.

to the needs and values of the working class.⁵⁴ In short, electoral reforms that democratized British politics in the nineteenth century made it possible for a socialist party to seek the electoral support of the now enfranchised majority of Englishmen who were exploited and alienated under capitalism and thus enabled such a party to gain control of the English government through democratic elections.

Socialists recognize, however, that representative democracy is not a complete realization of democratic ideals, for two major reasons. First, socialist values may not be sufficiently dominant among citizens and representatives to guide the democratic process effectively. Even representatives who are socialists may emphasize the immediate economic concerns of their constituents rather than the longer-term realization of socialist values. Second, inequalities in ownership and control of the means of production create persistent and illegitimate political inequalities within the system of representative democracy. Rather than responding to grassroots concerns and preferences, representatives respond primarily to the needs of capitalists and to the preferences of those with disproportionate wealth and status. Representative democracy must, therefore, be continually reformed in ways that enhance the equality of influence between such capitalist interests as industrialists, bankers, and realtors and such countervailing actors as labor unions, environmentalists, and neighborhood groups.

Socialists also want to augment the institutions of representative democracy with those of populist democracy. While liberals are unconcerned even when most citizens choose to be inactive politically, socialists want citizens to be more actively involved in addressing and resolving community problems in many contexts.⁵⁵

First, and most importantly, socialists support economic democracy, or **workplace democracy**. The workplace is a vital arena for democratic participation, because it is the place where people spend most of their lives and where relationships of authority and subordination are most pronounced. The importance of workplace democracy to socialism was emphasized by G. D. H. Cole (1889–1959), a British socialist professor who regarded the subordination of workers to their economic bosses as slavery and held it to be a greater evil than poverty.⁵⁶ Cole pointed to several positive effects of enhancing the involvement and influence of employees in industrial decision making. It would develop their appreciation of the socialist ideals of harmony, freedom,

⁵⁴The Chartist movement emphasized radical democratic politics, but it did not embrace socialism. For example, the Chartists wanted unemployed workers to be provided with small holdings of land and capital in order to produce a more competitive market system of small proprietors.

⁵⁵For an excellent analysis of the limitations of liberal democracy and a description of populist democracy, see Benjamin Barber's *Strong Democracy: Participatory Politics for a New Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

⁵⁶G. H. D. Cole, *Self-Government in Industry* (London: G. Bell, 1919), p. 33. A more recent argument for workplace democracy is provided by Carole Pateman in *Participation and Democratic Theory* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1970), pp. 67–84.

and justice; it would enhance their skills of participating in the democratic process; and thus, it would train workers for social democracy in the larger world. Workplace democracy would reduce workers' fear of authorities, instill in management an appreciation of the capacities of workers, and thus diminish social and class distinctions. And greater worker involvement would unleash the suppressed talents and energies of workers, enhancing economic productivity. Many recent experiments with worker participation in the governance of economic institutions provide encouragement to socialists (and even some liberals) about its effectiveness.⁵⁷

Second, socialists support **grassroots democracy**. Just as socialists want citizens to exercise more power in their workplaces, they also want citizens to exercise more power in the other organizations and associations in which they live their daily lives: families, religious groups, schools, civic groups, ethnic associations, neighborhoods, and so forth.⁵⁸ Thus, socialists want to "democratize" the family, equalizing the power of husbands and wives and ensuring that the needs and interests of children will be heard and respected. They also want to democratize their local communities, employing neighborhood assemblies to provide opportunities for citizens to discuss their immediate problems and goals, using community boards and task forces to develop concrete policy proposals, and enacting policies through city councils made more representative by such devices as selection by lot and frequent rotation of office.⁵⁹ By practicing more democracy at the grassroots level, citizens should become more skilled at defending their rights and interests in national politics. By learning how to promote communal harmony, individual freedom, and social justice locally, they will incorporate such socialist values into their analysis of national issues.

Third, socialists often support **direct democracy**, in which citizens can bypass representative institutions and place certain issues on the national agenda through public initiatives and can resolve national issues by referendum. Because they recognize that the vast majority of issues must inevitably be resolved by full-time legislators, socialists do not wish to replace representative democracy with direct democracy. But allowing citizens to vote directly on some key issues has several advantages. First, direct democracy may be an antidote to the domination of representative legislatures by special interests, especially corporate power.⁶⁰ Second, the possibility that issues will be put to a public vote should encourage representatives to act as delegates of their constituents, thereby increasing their responsiveness and sense of accountability

⁵⁷In *A Preface to Economic Democracy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), Robert Dahl argues that worker-controlled enterprises "are likely to tap the creativity, energies, and loyalties of workers to an extent that stockholder-owned corporations probably never can, even with profit-sharing schemes" (p. 132).

⁵⁸Harry Boyte, *The Backyard Revolution: Understanding the New Citizen Movement* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980).

⁵⁹Barber, *Strong Democracy*, pp. 267-278.

⁶⁰It can be argued, however, that corporate power may also influence citizens in referenda. See Thomas E. Cronin, *Direct Democracy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 99-116.

to the public. Third, providing for referenda and initiatives both acknowledges the wisdom, virtue, and judgment of citizens and encourages citizens to develop further these qualities. Contemporary liberals have exhausted the possibilities of quantitatively enlarging the franchise by extending the vote to everyone. By supporting direct democracy, socialists want to enlarge the franchise qualitatively, giving citizens not only a chance to select candidates who endorse socialist values but also opportunities to enact policies that can lead society down the road to socialism.

Citizenship

Socialists claim to have a much stronger sense of citizenship than do liberals. Their concern for communal harmony leads socialists to recognize that people are members of various groups and communities that offer them support and to which they give support in return. Their concern for individual liberty and their disdain for political domination leads socialists to emphasize the need for citizens to participate fully in the policy making of each such community. And their concern for social justice requires that socialists acknowledge the extensive obligations that this view of citizenship imposes.

While liberals emphasize one's citizenship within a particular nation, socialists acknowledge one's **multiple citizenships**. Socialists agree with liberals that a person is a citizen of a nation-state (and its various subnational governments), and their principles regarding the admission of newcomers as citizens to nation-states are similar to those of liberals. But socialists recognize that people are also citizens of supranational entities (e.g., the world community) and that this citizenship imposes certain moral obligations upon them. They also stress that people are citizens of nonstate communities (e.g., industrial enterprises, trade unions, minority groups, and women's groups) that make various demands on them. While contemporary liberals also recognize multiple memberships, they regard memberships in nonstate communities as elements of one's private life and as imposing moral obligations that can justify disobedience to the state and thus limit one's political obligations as a citizen. In contrast, socialists view multiple citizenships in states *and* in nonstate communities as essential parts of one's public life. Rather than limiting one's political obligations, citizenship in, say, a cooperative or a women's group extends one's need to participate in public life and to bear additional obligations to other members of these communities.

While liberals believe that citizens can be best served by limiting their participation, socialists call for extensive citizen participation. Citizen participation should begin locally, in families, schools, churches, neighborhood groups, and—most importantly—the workplaces of daily life. By actively participating in such local communities, citizens attain a greater sense of belonging, concern, and mutuality with others. Through such participation, they can use local groups as vehicles for solving common problems and thus exercise greater collective control over their lives. And a recognition that others should also participate in the decisions of local groups extends one's commitment to political

equality. Greater participation in local communities and workplaces will also help to politicize the relatively disadvantaged who don't participate fully in national elections and policy-making processes. The resultant greater and more representative participation of the citizenry in politics at the national level can begin to rectify the limitations of representative democracy and thus approach the social democratic ideals of political equality and popular control of government.

Socialists want to extend citizen obligations beyond those stressed by liberals. At best, liberals connect citizen obligations to citizen rights, as liberal principles of political obligation are based on contract theories specifying that citizens get certain goods and rights in exchange for meeting various obligations. Socialists regard the liberal social contract as too individualistic and shortsighted. Before willingly meeting their obligations to pay taxes for welfare services or to serve in the military for national security, liberal citizens are inclined to ask, "Am I personally benefited by these services?" and, "What has the government done for me lately?" Socialists expect citizens to take a less individualistic and more farsighted approach to what the social contract and the obligations that it imposes mean. For socialists, the social contract is not so much an agreement among individuals about their individual rights as it is a common understanding among citizens about their common needs and their obligation to cooperate with one another to satisfy these needs. What people need is not just the provision of individual rights but community itself, and thus people are obligated to give each other the respect and support needed to sustain themselves as a community.⁶¹ Additionally, citizens must participate in a collective decision-making process that enables them to identify what each individual needs in order to thrive in these communities. Once these needs—such as those for basic shelter, medical care, and transportation—have been identified, the socialist social contract calls on everyone to "pitch in" to satisfy these needs for all. Socialists do not try to provide a specific list of citizen obligations, because these obligations will depend on what each community regards as its common needs and universal obligations. Socialists would surely regard the communal provisions and accompanying obligations of American communities as inadequate.⁶²

The difference between liberal and socialist views regarding citizen obligation can be illustrated by considering the issue of "public service." President Clinton's proposal to have youth work for one or two years in public service jobs in order to pay back college loans is an attempt by a contemporary liberal to extend the liberal conception of citizen obligation. Citizens—but only some citizens—are asked to serve, and their obligation to serve is directly tied to receiving a concrete and material personal benefit (student aid) that is otherwise unavailable to them. In contrast, socialists call for "a program of universal citizen service [that] would enlist every American citizen—male and female alike—in a service corps for one to two years of either military or non-

⁶¹Walzer, *Spheres of Justice*, pp. 64–65.

⁶²Walzer, *Spheres of Justice*, p. 84.

military training and service."⁶³ Participants in the universal service programs of socialists would get some individual benefits, such as occupational training, but the greatest advantages garnered would be "fellowship and camaraderie, common activity, teamwork, service for and with others, and a sense of community . . . cooperation . . . and mutuality."⁶⁴ While extensive in comparison to liberal service—and mandatory instead of optional—socialist service is far less extensive and coercive than that conceived of by the fascist state, because socialist service covers only a brief period in the lives of youths and because people are provided choices as to where they will serve (e.g., in the military; in an international "peace corps"; in urban areas to aid the elderly, provide child care, or repair the infrastructure; in rural areas to work on ecological programs and flood control).

Liberals dislike such socialist proposals for extensive citizenship. Reflecting the liberal preference for private leisure over public participation, Oscar Wilde once commented that "the problem with socialism is that it takes too many evenings." And reflecting on the prospect of universal national service may prompt many students to believe that the problem with socialism is that it can take up too many years. Socialists reply that such criticisms embody the erroneous liberal belief that life can be segmented into a public life of citizenship and a private life of personal satisfaction. For the socialist, all life is necessarily social life. We are citizens even in the privacy of our homes, because our families (or other intimate associations) are de facto political associations involving collaborative problem solving, the identification of common needs, and the application of power. We are citizens at work, because our workplaces also involve collaborative problem solving, the identification of common needs, and the application of power. And the decisions of government and other public institutions profoundly affect how we live our "daily"—if not ever quite "private"—lives. Because it is impossible to distinguish public from private life, people are always citizens. By recognizing and acting upon the needs of people to participate in collective decision making and to accept their obligations as citizens, the socialist goals of communal harmony, individual freedom, social equality, and political democracy can be furthered.

THE PHILOSOPHICAL BASES

Ontology

As we have seen, socialists seek to change the world of capitalist domination by transforming liberal values into socialist ones and by pursuing socialist values through democratic applications of political power. Such a program is at odds with the Marxist ontology of economic determination. For orthodox

⁶³Benjamin Barber, *Strong Democracy*, pp. 298–303. See also Walzer, "Socializing the Welfare State," pp. 298–299.

⁶⁴Barber, *Strong Democracy*, p. 302.

Marxists, the economic infrastructure determines the social superstructure, which includes cultural values and the distribution of political power. Because capitalism requires and supports the liberal values of competition, rugged individualism, and equal opportunity, Marxist ontology asserts that socialist values cannot spread as long as capitalism persists. Because capitalism requires and supports the kind of representative democracy that empowers the capitalist class, Marxist ontology asserts that the development of more populist democratic institutions will inevitably be thwarted by capitalism. Eduard Bernstein viewed this orthodox Marxist ontology as being too materialist and too deterministic. Bernstein argued that orthodox Marxists are overly reductionist when they locate the source of all values and ideas in material and economic conditions.⁶⁵ In short, Bernstein claimed that ideology, ideas, and ethical considerations are important aspects of ultimate reality and that they are at least partly independent of economic factors.

While rejecting the materialism of Marx, the founders of democratic socialism did not, however, embrace the leading alternative ontology of the nineteenth century, Hegel's idealism, which claimed that ideas alone were real and that ideas determined historical progress. Instead, Bernstein turned to **neo-Kantianism** in order to synthesize these two ontologies.⁶⁶ In brief, Kant had distinguished between facts and values. For Kant, facts—like Marx's laws of economics and history—were part of the phenomenal world of appearance and could be known by humans through experience and reflection. But values and morality were part of a deeper ultimate reality (including God and immortality) that lay beyond the phenomenal world and was independent of factual and material considerations. Neo-Kantianism did not reject Marx's economic determinism but rather subordinated it to a deeper reality of morality and values. Neo-Kantianism permitted humans to will freely certain moralities—such as socialist values—simply because they were judged to be “right,” rather than necessary.

Socialist ontology can also be understood by contrasting it with that of classical liberalism. As we have seen, classical liberals thought that historical progress was determined by natural laws; according to Herbert Spencer, for example, human progress requires the survival of the fittest, implying that progress is best served by letting the weak and unfit become extinct. But socialists refuse to be governed by such natural laws. According to T. H. Huxley, “social progress means a checking of the cosmic progress [of natural selection] at every step and the substitution for it of another, which may be called the ethical process.”⁶⁷ In short, instead of submitting to a natural world of self-assertion, competition, and domination, humans can use their moral will to impose self-restraints, help their fellows, and create a just society.

Because they reject Marxist materialism and liberal naturalism, it can be

⁶⁵Bernstein, *Evolutionary Socialism*, pp. 13–14.

⁶⁶This discussion is based on McLellan, *Marxism After Marx*, pp. 33–38.

⁶⁷T. H. Huxley, “Evolution and Ethics,” in *Selections from the Essays of Huxley*, edited by Alburey Castell (Arlington Heights, Ill.: Crofts Classics, 1948 [1893]).

maintained that socialists do not ground their political ideology in any particular ontology. In one sense, this is true, because socialists do not claim to know ultimate reality and they believe that human history is neither determinate nor finite. In another sense, this is not true, because socialists do embrace certain ontological assumptions. Socialists believe that values are real, that they affect social life, and that they are at least partially independent of economic forces, natural laws, and other constraints on our freedom of choice. Socialists believe that humans—and human choices—can influence the course of evolution and history. Humans *should* choose democratic socialism, but humans *can* choose alternative ideologies. The choice is ours, and the course of history will reflect our choice.

Epistemology

Socialists do not believe that there is an independent epistemological basis for asserting the truth of socialist values. Their neo-Kantian ontology forces them to admit that humans cannot have certain knowledge that the values of communal harmony, individual freedom, social justice, and popular democracy should be pursued. Such values are chosen rather than known and accepted a priori. Because socialists recognize the subjectivity involved in choosing socialist values, they acknowledge that the values of their ideological competitors cannot be discounted. Socialists are thus willing to tolerate those ideologies that tolerate socialism, making socialism one of the “friends” of democratic pluralism.⁶⁸

This does not mean that socialists doubt that there is an abundance of good reasons for choosing to pursue socialist ends. Indeed, they often employ arguments drawn from the epistemological orientations of their ideological competitors to justify socialist goals.

To persuade classical liberals to embrace various universal economic entitlements, for example, some socialists have employed natural-law arguments.⁶⁹ Such socialists maintain that human beings are, by nature, equal in their common humanity and in certain species-specific properties, including their biological need for subsistence to survive and their natural need for certain comforts to live humanly well. Given these natural and equal needs, socialists argue that each person has a right to “all due necessities: honorable and fitting work . . . decent surroundings. . . . and leisure.”⁷⁰

To persuade contemporary liberals, socialists have used utilitarianism to argue that more economic equality maximizes the aggregate sum of happiness for humans as a whole. Since the satisfaction experienced by a poor man from the gain of a given sum of money is greater than the dissatisfaction that a rich

⁶⁸Bernard Crick, *In Defense of Politics* (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1962).

⁶⁹See Mortimer J. Adler, *Six Great Ideas* (New York: Macmillan, 1981), pp. 164–173. Most socialists argue, however, that needs are socially defined rather than defined by a determinate human nature.

⁷⁰William Morris, in a lecture on Jan. 13, 1884. The full quote is provided in Crick, *Socialism*, p. 67.

man experiences from the loss of that same sum of money, overall happiness in society is increased by redistributing money from the rich to the poor.⁷¹

To persuade conservatives, socialists have drawn upon tradition in order to justify certain applications of socialist values. For example, in the United States, traditional patriotic and religious values may be used to justify the establishment of more national holidays and the enactment of more "blue laws" prohibiting work on the Sabbath as ways of increasing universal provision of leisure time.⁷²

While socialist scholars hope that such justifications help convince people to accept the values of communal harmony, individual freedom, social equality, and popular democracy, they have been more concerned with showing deficiencies in the attainment of these values in existing capitalist societies. *Socialist social science* thus begins by describing departures from socialist ideals. Studies of "anomie"—a condition of personal detachment from the community and others in the community—reveal widespread and increasing departures from communal values.⁷³ Studies of "social control" reveal how the real liberties of individuals are compromised by capitalism and by even the most benevolent institutions of liberal governments.⁷⁴ Studies of the distribution of income and wealth reveal inequalities that shock the egalitarian spirit.⁷⁵ And studies of political power structures suggest illegitimate domination of democratic institutions by corporate chieftains.⁷⁶ By documenting departures from socialist and democratic ideals, social scientists with socialist orientations hope to awaken people to the need to pursue vigorously socialist alternatives.

Socialist social science also attempts to explain departures from socialist ideals. Of particular importance are the causes of economic and political inequalities. Inequalities of income might be acceptable if, for example, they were caused by such factors as natural differences in individual traits (e.g., IQ genotype) or in differences in individual effort (e.g., choosing to stay in school longer). But when research indicates that income differences are better

⁷¹Arthur Cecil Pigou, *The Economics of Welfare*, 4th ed. (London: Macmillan, 1948), p. 89.

⁷²Walzer, *Spheres of Justice*, pp. 184–196. Socialists have long understood that leisure time is a fundamental human necessity and have complained that, under capitalism, the rich are able to buy much more of it than ordinary citizens. Observance of many holidays and of the Sabbath are conservative traditions while also being socialist measures to provide a baseline of leisure time to everyone.

⁷³Steven Lukes, "Alienation and Anomie," in *Philosophy, Politics, and Society*, 3d ed., edited by Peter Laslett and W. G. Runciman (Oxford: Basil Blackman, 1967), pp. 140–156; and Herbert McClosky and John Schaar, "Psychological Dimensions of Anomy," *American Sociological Review* 30 (1965), pp. 14–40.

⁷⁴Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, *Regulating the Poor: The Functions of Public Welfare* (New York: Vintage Books, 1971).

⁷⁵Harrell R. Rodgers, *Poverty Amid Plenty* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1979); and E. Goffman, "The Income Gap and Its Causes," *Dissent* (winter 1990).

⁷⁶C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956); and G. William Domhoff, *The Power Elite and the State: How Policy is Made in America* (New York: A. DeGrayter, 1990).

Sidebar 9-3

*The Distribution of Household Income and Wealth in the United States**

Families, ranked by income (lowest to highest)	% of total income			% of total net worth in 1984	% of total financial assets in 1984
	in 1947	in 1971	in 1991		
Lowest 20 percent	3.4	4.1	3.8	-1	-4
Middle 60 percent	51.1	52.4	49.7	34	14
Highest 20 percent	45.5	43.5	46.5	67	90

The above data on the distribution of income for 1947, 1971, and 1991 indicate the extent and degree of economic inequality in the United States. They suggest that the degree of income inequality has been fairly constant since 1945, though income inequality decreased slightly during the era of the "great society" and increased again during the Reagan era. These data also show that the richest 20 percent of all Americans have had over 10 times as much annual income as the poorest 20 percent of all Americans. While such inequalities may seem shocking in themselves, even more disturbing is the fact that such data significantly *underestimate* economic inequality. First, in arriving at these figures, the mean income of households with incomes greater than \$100,000 was assumed to be \$100,000 exactly. This assumption has the effect of making the shares of

the highest income group about 20 percent smaller in the table than they actually were. Second, measures of the distribution of wealth for 1984 (reported in the last two columns) suggest the existence of much more inequality than is indicated by the measures of the distribution of income. When wealth is conceptualized as net worth—as the value of all family assets less any debts—survey samples show that the poorest families typically have more debts than assets and that the richest families have 67 percent of all net worth. Moreover, when wealth is conceptualized solely as net financial assets—a measure which excludes homes and vehicles and considers only those assets that are available for future transactions (like bank savings and holdings of stocks and bonds)—survey data suggest that about 90 percent of all such wealth is held by the richest 20 percent of all families.

*The data for the distribution of income for 1947 are drawn from Edward Budd, "Postwar Changes in the Size Distribution of Income in the U.S.," *American Economic Review, Papers and Proceedings* 60 (May 1970), p. 253. Data are aggregated by families and unrelated individuals. The data for the distribution of income in 1971 and 1991 are from the U.S. Bureau of the Census, "Money Income in 1991 of Households in the United States," *Current Population Reports*, P-60, no. 180 (Washington, D.C.: U.S.

Government Printing Office, 1992), p. xv. Data are aggregated by household; this change in the unit of analysis has the effect of slightly decreasing the measured amount of inequality. Data on the distribution of net worth and financial assets in 1984 come from Melvin L. Oliver and Thomas Shapiro, "Wealth of a Nation: A Reassessment of Asset Inequality in America Shows at Least One-Third of Households Are Asset-Poor," *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 49 (Apr. 1990), p. 137.

explained by such things as the race and gender of individuals or by "luck,"⁷⁷ socialists argue that these inequalities are unfair and fail to serve a social purpose.

Finally, socialist social science can lend support to socialist values by showing the adverse effects evidenced when there are wide departures from these values and beneficial effects evidenced when their ideals are more fully realized. Thus, socialists seek to show that when societies attain more economic equality, they also attain more economic prosperity, more civil liberties, and greater social stability.⁷⁸

In summary, socialists believe that there is no single intellectual tradition that justifies socialism. As a result, democratic socialism is not "theoretically heavy" and its epistemological roots are much less dense than those of Marxism.⁷⁹ Socialists are much more interested in asserting and defending their values than in developing mighty intellectual abstractions as "proofs" of their ideology. Yet, socialists believe that there are certain considerations that point reflective people toward socialism. The most important of these considerations are that people are failing to achieve their unique human potentialities in capitalist societies and that capitalist societies are riddled with unnecessary and unjustified inequalities and hierarchies.

Human Nature

Socialists regard the essential nature of humanity as a whole as being mysterious and undefinable. Hence, it is impossible to make valid abstract generalizations about humans, because each person is unique.⁸⁰ People have important differences in such natural endowments as intelligence, dexterity, and energy. Each person is influenced by others and influences various others, and these influences result in peoples having different goals and understandings. Each person is perceived and recognized by others in distinct ways. In short, each person has a unique identity based on different personal qualities, different experiential influences, different socially constituted goals and perspectives, and distinct recognitions.

However, according to socialists, our unique identities are not fully tolerated and appreciated in capitalist society. Capitalism treats people as replaceable cogs in the machinery of mass production and as interchangeable consumers in mass markets. The culture surrounding capitalism—while giving lip service to liberal ideas about individuality—actually represses individual identities.

As a result of such repression, people are prevented from fully recognizing, developing, and utilizing their individual capacities. Although people are

⁷⁷Christopher Jencks, *Inequality* (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1972), pp. 209–246.

⁷⁸See, for example, Hollis Chenery et al, *Redistribution with Growth* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974); and Ekkart Zimmerman, "Macrocomparative Research on Political Protest," in *Handbook of Political Conflict*, edited by Ted Gurr (New York: Free Press, 1980), pp. 199–202.

⁷⁹Crick, *Socialism*, p. 66.

⁸⁰Schaar, "Equal Opportunity and Beyond," p. 248.

given some economic incentives for developing those capacities that are rewarded in the market system, they are given little social encouragement for developing their other capacities. In a society marked by competition, people are wary of the achievements of others, because others are seen as threats to one's own well-being, but in a society of communal harmony—of respect and support for others—people encourage others to fulfill their potential in order that society as a whole might prosper. In a society marked by great inequalities, many people lack the resources to develop their potentialities; but in a society in which people's basic needs are met, there will be fewer social and economic constraints to self-development.

Under the various types of repression inherent to a capitalist culture, people also fail to have their unique identities fully recognized, respected, and encouraged. Although people are given some civil liberties that protect some elements of their personal and private lives, they are encouraged to seek conventional goals that reflect the needs of the capitalist system and they are encouraged to attain conventional understandings of the social world through an educational system that rewards conformity (see the box entitled "Socialist Perspectives on Schools"). Socialists recognize that conventional goals and understandings are socially constructed, and thus limited, by the prejudices and ignorance that abound in any social group. People can develop more challenging goals and deeper understandings—and thus identities that depart from convention—by moving beyond the parochialism of their immediate associations. People can develop their unique identities by joining groups and communities composed of people who are different from themselves and by immersing themselves in cultures that are foreign to them. The process of developing such unique identities needs to be encouraged, and the identities that emerge need to be respected, and their value recognized.

Society

Socialists reject both individualistic and holistic conceptions of society.⁸¹ The liberal image of society as simply an aggregation of individuals is analytically defective because it fails to comprehend how individuals are shaped by social forces, and it is morally defective because it encourages selfishness and egotism. The conservative and the totalitarian conceptions of society as independent of and prior to the individuals within it are also analytically defective because they fail to recognize how individuals shape their societies, and they are morally defective because the sacrifice of unique individuals to the perceived good of the community is viewed as acceptable. For socialists, the individualistic and holistic conceptions of society must be integrated and balanced.

For socialists, societies are simply collections of individuals who associate with each other. Such associations define not only the relationships between the individuals but also the goals they seek to achieve as a collectivity. There are many types of societies and each society is unique, making it as difficult to make abstract generalizations about societies as it is to generalize about

⁸¹Nove, *The Economics of Feasible Socialism*, p. xii.

humans. Countries constitute only one type of society—as local political communities, schools, churches, unions, workplaces, and other associations are also societies. Within and across these kinds of societies, two main differences should be analyzed. First, societies differ in the extent to which their members are committed to one another and seek a common life. Second, societies differ in terms of how power and privilege is distributed among the members of the community.

Societies may minimize or may emphasize the collective or common lives of their members. When societies minimize common lives, they may be little more than marketplaces in which individuals pursue their self-interest by exchanging goods with each other. In such societies, the prevailing question is, How should I live? In contrast, when societies emphasize their common lives, the prevailing question is, How should we live? In such societies, the members (or their representatives) assemble in order to define their collective goals. They decide what the people within that society need and how these needs should be provided. They decide what collective investments—goods that belong to society as a whole—should be pursued and protected. Most importantly, the individuals in such societies are willing to invest their time and commit their resources to improving their common lives. For socialists, societies that emphasize the common lives of their members are far more attractive than individualistic societies.⁸²

Although societies can have more or less equal distributions of power and privilege, socialists recognize that there is no such thing as a classless society.⁸³ Individuals within all societies are stratified in various ways. Marx was right to emphasize stratification based on ownership of productive resources, as the class that owns most of society's productive resources normally dominates those classes with fewer productive resources. But inequalities in the distribution of power and privilege in a society can be based on other factors, such as occupational status, access to positions of authority, educational attainment, ethnicity, race, and gender. For example, even communist societies that abolish private property fail to become classless societies because they merely replace stratification based on property with stratification based on authoritative power or position. While all societies will have inequalities as the result of such factors, socialists prefer societies in which these inequalities are minimized and in which the inequalities that exist do not hinder or preclude the recognition that all individuals are equally members of society and entitled to equal respect as humans.

A socialist ethic of fraternity and equality helps to build societies in which there is a strong commitment by their members to building common lives and to minimizing the domination of some individuals by others. Socialist parties and socialist theorists can preach such an ethic, but the ethic must be lived on an everyday basis if a socialist society is to be built. Thus, local communities—like workplaces, neighborhoods, and schools—are places where people can

⁸²Michael Walzer, "The Community," *The New Republic* (Mar. 31, 1982), pp. 11–14.

⁸³Tom B. Bottomore, *Classes in Modern Society*, 2d ed. (London: HarperCollins Academic, 1991), p. 29.

actually work together to define common lives and treat each other with equal respect. As these local communities more closely approximate the communal and egalitarian associations that socialists prefer, it will be increasingly possible for national societies to evolve in socialist directions.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

It is often observed that socialism is an endangered political ideology. In recent years, Western European societies (and the United States) have drifted toward more conservative outlooks. Socialist parties have lost political support. The demise of communism in the former Soviet empire is sometimes taken as additional evidence that socialism is unworkable as a set of ideas for governing nations. Democratic socialists, of course, deny that the collapse of communism signifies the weakness of socialism, because they regard communism as a distinct ideology, one they have always opposed because of its authoritarian and totalitarian tendencies. More troubling for democratic socialists is the ascension of the "ideology of selfishness" in both its contemporary conservative and liberal forms. They wonder about a "derangement of modern life" in which many people experience unprecedented levels of prosperity and erroneously believe that they have "made it on their own," ignoring that "we all prosper together or not at all" and retreating from the spirit of mutualism that lies at the heart of socialism.⁸⁴ Nevertheless, democratic socialists do not regard this movement away from socialist values as irreversible. The current period of retrenchment can be followed by fresh movements in socialist directions as people experience once again the economic and social problems and moral decay of capitalist domination and the evolution of its ideology of selfishness.

Perhaps the prospects for a democratic socialist resurgence are less favorable in the United States than they are elsewhere in the world. One commonplace in the study of ideologies is that the United States is exceptional because it is the only advanced industrial society where democratic socialist ideology and democratic socialist parties are dismissed as outside the realm of everyday politics. Students of **American exceptionalism** have proposed a number of explanations for this phenomenon.⁸⁵ Cultural explanations suggest that socialism in America is hindered by the ethos of rugged individualism, the dream of upward mobility, and the fear of equality. Economic explanations suggest that America's great natural resources, coupled with the development of industrialism, have permitted unusual economic expansion and have provided opportunities for the vast majority of Americans to succeed within capitalism and thus Americans are reluctant to oppose capitalism. Historical-political explanations suggest that the U.S. Constitution was specifically designed to reduce the capacity of any class-based faction—such as a socialist party—to dominate the political system. Sociological explanations suggest that American ethnic and racial heterogeneity have made it difficult for the working classes of various ethnic and racial groups to unify behind a socialist party that represents their common economic interests. While the thesis of American exceptionalism is certainly important—and discouraging to those who support democratic socialism—it may also be somewhat misleading.

Perhaps Americans are not exceptionally hostile to democratic socialist values and

⁸⁴Walzer, "The Community," p. 11–12.

⁸⁵A brief introduction to the literature on American exceptionalism is available in Irving Howe, *Socialism and America* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1985), pp. 105–144.

policies. Perhaps what is remarkable about the United States is that "it practices middle-class socialism" through its extensive regulations of capitalism, its numerous social distributions, and its various uses of populist democratic processes, but "calls it something else."⁸⁶ Perhaps it is the term "socialism" that Americans dislike, even while they admire many of its values and ideals and put them into practice in many ways.

There are many ideas and ideals to admire in socialism. It provides provocative insights into problems with capitalism. Its goals regarding communal harmony, individual freedom, social justice, and popular democracy may simply constitute a logical, progressive extension of liberal values. It is difficult to dismiss as unreasonable socialist principles supporting a political economy of market socialism, endorsing governmental authority that acts as a counterforce to capitalist domination, seeking a more just distribution of economic goods and political power, and calling for a stronger sense of citizenship. Socialist strategies for achieving change, emphasizing evolutionary progress through democratic action and persuasion, certainly fall within the realm of acceptable pluralist politics.

What, then, are the deficiencies of socialism as a political outlook? Perhaps its criticisms of capitalism could lead to the dismantling of the world's most productive and prosperous economic system. Perhaps its goals—enhancing individual freedom, providing more equal conditions, and developing more communal harmony—are not as compatible with each other as socialists claim. Perhaps the changes sought by socialism threaten social stability. Perhaps its endorsement of strong government creates oppressive domination by a governmental elite. Perhaps socialist societies inevitably produce bureaucratic red tape, depersonalization, and inefficiency. Perhaps its ideas of social justice create false expectations about a more egalitarian society that is unachievable. Perhaps socialists seek too much democracy, forgetting that when citizens are overly empowered they end up electing charlatans and demagogues and pursuing policies that undermine the public good and the rights of minorities. Perhaps the whole socialist project is founded on naive and overly optimistic assumptions about human nature and society; while stressing the benevolent possibilities within humans and societies, socialists may ignore the inherent weakness of humans and the need to structure society to account for such weaknesses. Contemporary conservatives have found many such deficiencies in socialism (and its less radical friend, contemporary liberalism). Their ideas and arguments will be explored in the next chapter.

⁸⁶Alan Ryan, "Socialism for the Nineties," *Dissent* (fall 1990), p. 438.