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DEMOCRATIC PLANNED SOCIALISM

Moving Beyond Capitalism to Support and Promote Human Development

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Introduction

Two points of confusion immediately thrust themselves into almost all discussions on what socialism is. These two issues need to be addressed before one can even begin to meaningfully consider the question.

The simpler of the two issues is to indicate the common confusion between two different things that too often are, and must not be, conflated. The first of these is what this short chapter is intended as, an introduction to a clear statement of the general modern concept of socialism, as it has been (and continues to be) historically developed by its advocates for a better world. The second and very different thing is to look at the very broad spectrum of social systems in the real world, which at one time or another have self-declared that they were building socialism, and then try to define socialism from this spectrum of experiences. There are two reasons why the second approach will not be pursued in this chapter. The first and most mechanical reason is that to try to do so would require a book-length study, which is precluded for this chapter. There were almost 20 such countries which actually developed non-capitalist economies, plus a large number of other self-declared “socialist countries” at times, especially in Africa and Latin America, which in fact never eliminated their capitalist economies. All of these were different, and so all would need to be treated separately and in detail. Some politically simplistic labeling of them such as “not socialist because they were Stalinist and non-democratic” for those with non-capitalist economies, or “not socialist because they remained capitalist” notwithstanding their benefits for their poor for the others, would be no more than (correct) labeling, not a determination of the nature of socialism from their experiences. But the deeper reason for not trying to establish the

concept of socialism from real-world experiences is that it would be a blatant case of circular reasoning. One cannot evaluate what real-world practices contributed to or precluded the building of socialism until one has a concept of socialism to compare the real-world practices to, in order to evaluate their “socialist or anti-socialist nature.” Even to carry out the simplistic labeling of real-world experiences suggested above requires that one have a concept of socialism to use to give those labels. This chapter will then avoid this common confusion and address only the necessary first step of giving the fundamental nature of today’s concept of socialism, as it congealed originally in the nineteenth century and then has continuously evolved until today.

The second point of massive confusion concerning the consideration of “what is socialism,” even once one has clearly established that one means “what is the concept of socialism,” is that the definition of the concept of socialism is not like the definition of, for example, a quadratic equation. For such a concept, there is a universal social agreement as to the nature of the concept, to the extent that anyone advocating a different concept is considered “to have made an error.” That is not the case for many concepts central to the debates in the various social sciences. There is a plethora of somewhat different concepts of socialism.

Among this large number of different concepts of socialism, however, many aspects of many of them overlap. This chapter will present a concept of socialism rooted in three different types of ideas about what a system must be like to be considered socialist, ideas common to the majority of modern concepts of socialism. The first ideas concern the concept of human nature, ideas that underlie why socialist systems are called “socialist.” The second type of ideas about the definition of socialism concerns the plethora of socialism’s goals. The final type of ideas determining the concept of socialism are the various organizational and operation principles people maintain would constitute a socialist system. Of the scores of these in the literature, this chapter will consider here as illustrations three that are widely considered central for a system to be considered socialist. The last of these three also brings up the important point concerning the common confusion between the concept socialism, the topic of this chapter, and a concept that builds on socialism but then goes beyond it, communism.

A fundamental division exists in the spectrum of concepts of socialism between those put forward by people who advocate for replacing the current organization of society with a social organization consistent with their concept of socialism and those put forward by people who have created negative concepts of socialism in order to defend capitalism against the changes advocated by socialism. Shared aspects of various different concepts of socialism of this latter type are familiar to anyone who has grown up in the extremely pejorative US news and educational environments: lack of personal choice concerning anything, lack of democracy and uniformity, lack of variety in all aspects of life, lack of material well-being, lack of freedom, and so on. These concepts of

socialism share almost no basic aspects with the many different concepts of socialism of its advocates. As advocates use the word socialism, this “US brain-washing” is not “socialism.” This “non-socialist concept of socialism”¹ will not be discussed in this chapter.

This still leaves a very broad spectrum of different concepts of socialism among its advocates. This chapter will elaborate on a meta-concept called Democratic Planned Socialism. Section 2 will briefly indicate two aspects of the concept of human nature inherent in the goals of Democratic Planned Socialism. Section 3 will indicate what the goals of Democratic Planned Socialism are, which are so fundamental to its nature. Section 4 will then indicate three general organizational and operational principles for Democratic Planned Socialism that further indicate what it is. The meta-concept of Democratic Planned Socialism differs from a number of other socially relevant meta-concepts in the spectrum of concepts of socialism.

Two Aspects of Human Nature

The first “background socialist assumption” on human nature is that humans by their nature are a *collective and social species-being*. Many of the goals and operational principles looked at in Sections 3 and 4 rest to differing degrees on this assumption. A somewhat extended quote from early modern socialist writings in 1844 gives a particularly clear example of this socialist assumption about human nature. It also highlights a number of the important negative consequences seen today which result from a social organization inconsistent with this aspect of human nature.

Since *human* nature is the *true community* of men², by manifesting their *nature* men *create*, produce, the *human community*, the social entity, which is no abstract universal power opposed to the single individual, but is the essential nature of each individual, his own activity, his own life, his own spirit, his own wealth... as long as man does not recognise himself as man, and therefore has not organised the world in a human way, this *community* appears in the form of *estrangement*, because its *subject*, man, is a being estranged from himself... To say that *man* is estranged from himself, therefore, is the same thing as saying that the *society* of this estranged man is a caricature of his *real community*, of his true species-life, that his activity therefore appears to him as a torment, his own creation as an alien power, his wealth as poverty, the *essential bond* linking him with other men as an unessential bond,... and he himself, the lord of his creation, as the servant of this creation.

(Marx³ 1844a: *emphasis in the original*)

As a part of this discussion of socialism’s understanding of the collective and social nature of humans, it is important to consider its view of the individual.

This is particularly important today, given the currently much-discussed important contribution of *hyper-individualism* to the social breakdown of “the modern world,” for example, to the current social implosion of the United States.⁴ With the birth of neoliberalism, Margaret Thatcher took this assumption to a new level of popular presentation in 1987 with her claim that there is no such thing as society, only individuals and families.

A standard attack on socialism by the defenders of capitalism is that it subordinates the interests of the *individual* to those of the *collective*, and effectively dissolves the individual into the collective. It will become apparent in the next section that the goals of socialism are exactly the opposite, to create a social system that supports and promotes the development of all individuals to their full potential. But socialism’s understanding of the individual, and its understanding of the false concept of the individual that underpins capitalism, is conceptually deeper and richer than just this. Capitalism’s “isolated individual”⁵ consists of an individuality that not only exists independently of the existence of anyone else or society, but further, one where individual interests in general are opposed to society’s interests. Equivalent to its understanding of human nature as inherently social, socialism to the contrary understands individuals as “social individuals.” An obvious point concerning the concept of social individuals is that human individuals are individuals whose individuality is shaped in part by society. But a little reflection on human nature and human existence indicates the social nature of their individuality goes deeper than that. Given their innate species-abilities, if individual humans could not interact socially, they could not even survive in the world. Again, this issue of the relation of the individual to the collective was specifically and carefully addressed already in early modern socialist theory:

Above all we must avoid postulating “society” again as an abstraction *vis-à-vis* the individual. The individual *is the social being*. His manifestations of life – even if they may not appear in the direct form of *communal* manifestations of life carried out in association with others – *are* therefore an expression and confirmation of *social life*. Man’s individual and species-life are not *different*, however much – and this is inevitable – the mode of existence of the individual is a more *particular* or more *general* mode of the life of the species, or the life of the species is a more *particular* or more *general* individual life.

(Marx 1844b: *emphasis in the original*)

The point is rather that private interest is itself already a socially determined interest and can be attained only within the conditions laid down by society and with the means provided by society and is therefore tied to the reproduction of these conditions and means. It is the interest of private persons;

but its content, as well as the form and means of its realization, are given by social conditions that are independent of them all.

(Marx 1857)

To understand what socialism is, its second assumption about human nature that must be understood is that a *differentia specifica* of humans is that they have some capabilities that no other animals have. Two of these understandings of human nature that are of central importance to the concept of socialism are that humans have the ability to imagine future states of reality different from the existing reality, and that humans have the capability to employ rational thought, or reason, to decide how they want to realize whatever future state is desired. Socialism holds that beyond the ability to act, which is common to most animals, *humans can act consciously*. These characteristics could be called “specifically human,” or as in the second quote to follow, “truly human.”

Although the direct topic in the following work from 1867 is human labor, this early modern socialist discussion brings out clearly this background assumption about human nature:

We are not now dealing with those primitive instinctive forms of labour that remind us of the mere animal. ... We presuppose labour in a form that stamps it as exclusively human. A spider conducts operations that resemble those of a weaver, and a bee puts to shame many an architect in the construction of her cells. But what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is this, that the architect raises his structure in imagination before he erects it in reality. At the end of every labour process, we get a result that already existed in the imagination of the labourer at its commencement. He not only effects a change of form in the material on which he works, but he also realizes a purpose of his own ...

(Marx 1867)

All animals are active, and they even transform their environment in accord with their needs. A socialist understanding of human nature and one that is important to the goals and organizational principles of socialism, however, holds that only humans do so *consciously*, in that many of their actions are linked to thought, contemplation, and reason, in a way that no other animal is capable of.

While the following quote from 1878 indicates very specifically one of the goals of socialism that will be discussed in the next section, here it is being presented *not* to consider that goal of socialism, but rather only as a second quote to underline socialism’s second fundamental belief about human nature, about the human capability for *conscious* action.

With the seizing of the means of production by society, production of commodities is done away with, and, simultaneously, the mastery of the product over the producer. The struggle for individual existence disappears. The whole sphere of the conditions of life which environ man, and which have hitherto ruled man, now comes under the dominion and control of man, who for the first time becomes the real, conscious lord of nature, because he has now become master of his own social organization. ... Only from that time will man himself, with full consciousness, make his own history – only from that time will the social causes set in movement by him have, in the main and in a constantly growing measure, the results intended by him. It is humanity's leap from the kingdom of necessity to the kingdom of freedom.

(Engels 1987)

With these two background socialist assumptions on human nature established, which will be manifested repeatedly throughout the next two sections, the chapter will now return to the direct consideration of the question “what is socialism?” First, a fundamental determinant of the nature of any social system is its goals. Section 3 will consider the goals of socialism. But despite their fundamental importance, the goals of a social system by themselves do not fully determine its nature. What are envisioned as appropriate ways to achieve those goals also determine the nature of the social system, and Section 4 will consider three such organizational principles of Democratic Planned Socialism.

The Goals and the Goal of Socialism

In the quote by Engels above one sees three from among the plethora of broad goals that were cited frequently in the 19th and 20th centuries (and still are today). The first was that “man makes his own history.” This is tied to the concept of human nature that was considered above that humans have the potential to act consciously, and from that gain increased collective self-determination over their social existence. Two other common expressions of this same idea are that “people collectively become the *subjects* of history as opposed to being its *objects*,” and that “people collectively become the masters of their own fate.” The second goal of socialism indicated in the quote by Engels is that humans “become the master of [their] own social organization.” Other expressions commonly used to indicate goals of socialism roughly equivalent to this are “self-determination,” “self-governance,” “socialist democracy,” or even simply “democracy.” The third commonly indicated goal of socialism in the quote is “freedom,” often expressed roughly equivalently as “liberty,” or by the act that freedom or liberty is obtained by, “self-emancipation.”

While this last goal of socialism is often referred to simply as “emancipation,” it is important for this chapter's focus on understanding socialism to briefly pause in the listing of goals of socialism to underline why the prefix

“self” is needed for all goals that are actions for constructing socialism. It is a profound misunderstanding of socialism to see it as only concerned with material well-being and material equality. Cows have great material well-being in that the drive for maximum profits means they get all the food they want, immediate care for any medical problems, housing suitable to protect their health and well-being, and maybe even air conditioning for milk cows to boost their production if that passes a cost-benefit analysis. But “being materially taken care of” by Plato’s philosopher kings or by “Father of the Nations” Joseph Stalin is inconsistent with the socialist goal that has been considered of collective self-determination, of becoming the collective masters of all the institutions that society consists of. Developing the potential to be more fully human definitionally (by the socialist definition of being human) requires being the collective active agents in determining everything about social existence, since such collective self-determination is, as previously seen, something specifically human. In contrast with the drivers of capitalism that are presented as acting on the isolated individual, emancipation must be collective self-emancipation, governance must be collective self-governance, and so on.

Other broad goals of socialism often used, many of them also connected to the previous points on socialism’s assumptions on human nature, include human development (of each individual, and of the human species); becoming more fully human, or “truly human”; developing humans’ potential, or abilities, or capabilities; meaningful work (that will develop us as individuals and as a species); free human activity; solidarity; equality; an end to oppression (a negative formulation of the goal of freedom); an end to exploitation; variety; maximizing individual choices consistent with the well-being of society; and many more. In addition to such general goals, there are many common more concrete goals, which could be thought of as supporting and promoting the more general goals just listed. These include universal health care, universal free education, abolition of child labor, humanly dignified housing, social control of production, various aspects of social security, and an additional plethora of other such concrete goals.

By the end of the 20th century, capitalism’s operational goal of production for the purpose of expanding capital – roughly, “production for profit” – had initiated massive and rapidly escalating environmental destruction. In line with the goals of socialism being determined by humanity’s drive to replace the practices of capitalism which harm humanity with non-harmful ones, protecting the environment and ecological sustainability have become additional standard goals of almost all concepts of socialism for the 21st century.

In line with these observations, it can be useful when talking about the desirability of socialism quite abstractly to think of it as having a single fundamental goal, with the plethora of goals just indicated then being thought of as subgoals. As subgoals of socialism, they still are goals that socialism is intended to achieve better than capitalism, but now instead of simply being postulated as goals of socialism, they obtain their justification as subgoals from being

considered to contribute to achieving the single postulated fundamental goal. This author frequently refers to the central goal of socialism as “human development,” as do numerous other advocates of socialism.

In practice, it makes no difference for using socialism’s goals in order to evaluate some proposed policies if one talks of a plethora of goals or of a single goal with subgoals. If one were to consider the former and some policy supports and promotes them all, then that policy supports and promotes socialism. But a problem with having multiple goals arises when some policy supports one and harms another. A classic example for economists is the Federal Reserve’s claimed dual goal of fighting inflation and maintaining full employment. In practice if some proposed policy promotes one goal and harms another, society then has to decide what it considers to be the tradeoff between the goals, how much gain for the one must result to offset the loss for the other. But talking of socialism as having a single broad goal such as human development, and hence posing the question whether the policy promotes or harms this single goal, does not avoid this problem in any way. To decide if human development is increased or decreased, one needs to decide if the policy’s increased contribution to it from one subgoal contributes more or less than the loss to it from the other subgoal, which is obviously exactly the same social choice.⁶

Another dimension of looking at the goal of socialism as human development is to, in addition to seeing it as the goal of the desired better society, see it in relation to the history of humanity. Eric Fromm presented it concisely this way in 1961:

... the history of mankind is the history of increasing human development.
(*Fromm 1961*)

In an equally terse indication of this goal of human development in 1970 Paulo Freire also included the historical dimension, and then went beyond that to present the crucial dimension of the goal of human development as rooted in the very nature of being human – not only do we pursue being more human, but we do so exactly because it is part of the nature of being human to do so: it is

... man’s ontological and historical vocation to be more fully human.
(*Freire 1992*)

Three General Organizational and Operational Principles for Democratic Planned Socialism

First, a comment on the nature of the ideas in this section of this chapter’s discussion of what socialism is. It would be a violation of the fundamental socialist concept of collective self-determination to specify exact institutional and organizational details that members of society must implement to create a

socialist society. Reducing members of society to being mechanical implementors of a predetermined script is the direct opposite of socialism's goal of empowering them to be the collective masters of their own fate.

Establishing *principles* for social organization (hereafter, “organizational principles”) considered necessary to achieve the goals of socialism, however, does not suffer from that problem. A wide variety of institutional and organizational details would be consistent with these organizational principles, giving rise to a heterogeneity of socialisms, exactly as there is a heterogeneity of capitalisms. The nature of these principles are not “recipes” or “blueprints” for humans to follow in order to build and operate a socialist society. To the contrary, these principles are precisely part of the subject of this chapter, establishing what socialism is. To be concrete on what this claim means exactly, consider the first such principle that will be discussed, social planning of social production. This is not being put forward as “what the social agents must do.” To the contrary, to generate socialism, the social actors must collectively decide for themselves how exactly they will organize and operate their society. If that choice is not consistent with the socialist organizational principle of social planning of social production, however, then what they have decided to create will not be socialism. These organizational principles are not scripts for action, but rather part of the specification of what socialism is, and what is not socialism.

In his detailed preface to his *Envisioning Real Utopias*, Erik Olin Wright clearly indicated the important “mid-level role” of such socialist organizational and operational principles in specifying what socialism is.

... workable institutional principles that could inform emancipatory alternatives to the existing world. This falls between a discussion simply of the moral values that motivate the enterprise [of indicating possible emancipatory alternatives] and the fine-grained details of institutional characteristics.

(Wright 2010)

The three general organizational and operational principles to be discussed here to further establish the concept of Democratic Planned Socialism are reflected in its name. The first is social planning of social production, and this will include discussions of social ownership of the means of production, and the contentious issues of markets and money in socialism. The second is democracy and will include discussions of classes and the much-debated nature of the state in socialism. The final is the principle of social organization and operation that differentiates the concept of socialism from the concept of communism.

Social planning of social production

The socialist argument for the necessity of social planning for social production is not an “economic reductionist” argument that this will raise human

productivity and hence output of socially produced goods and services, though that is an expected result. To the contrary, the socialist argument is that this is necessary in line with socialism's goal of human development and socialism's understanding of human nature. Planning in one way or another is the specifically human way humans do everything in their lives. In capitalism, social production is determined by the mechanical summation of the decisions on what to produce (and how to do so, and how many people to employ, etc.) in pursuit of their profits by the minority of society that own the means of production.⁷

It was almost universally accepted by advocates of socialism in the 20th century who understood socialism as a system contrary to capitalism⁸ that social planning of social production required social ownership of the means of production. This follows immediately because whoever owns the means of production is, by their property rights, empowered to plan how they will be used and hence determine social production.

Following the failure of the dominant attempts in the 20th century to build socialism without markets,⁹ the century ended and the next one began with discussions of the possibility of using markets to build socialism. Using the socialist reason for social planning of social production just given, and understanding markets as any place where equivalents are exchanged, there is no theoretical reason one could not build "socialism with markets," using markets as tools for the distribution of intermediate goods in the process of production¹⁰ and of final goods for consumption. The operational principle is that the economy be fully planned by society to attempt to produce what it decides to produce. Whatever tools are used are appropriate as long as they allow such planning and related control. Much of the opposition to using markets in socialism comes from a confusion of the concept of "markets as a site for the exchange of equivalents,"¹¹ with "markets required by the circuits of capital" in capitalism. Not only are these two different things, but the exploitation that occurs in capitalism, which is its *raison d'être*, doesn't actually occur in the market exchanges of equivalents in any case.¹² The many variants of what has become known as "market socialism," however, are driven by individual production units deciding what to produce to maximize the returns to themselves, with some subsequent redistribution by the government to reduce the inequality in revenue this inevitably produces. Unlike in "socialism with markets," social production under "market socialism" does not involve social planning, and so it is not socialism. The various models of market socialism are fundamentally just particular variants of left social-democratic capitalist production.

Note that accepting that socialism could use the tool of markets to organize parts of its social production and distribution is not an assertion that it has to, or even that doing so would necessarily be more efficient than any conceivable non-market system. With modern information technology, it would be possible to do what the old unsuccessful material balance systems could not do. The most worked-out presentation of this argument has been made over the course of three

decades by Cockshott and Cottrell, beginning with its first comprehensive presentation in 1993 (Cockshott and Cottrell 1993). However, in direct opposition to the twentieth century, the issue of if one could have efficient material balance planning for socialism is socially moot today, in the sense that the governments that have self-declared that they are working to build some form of socialism – China, Vietnam, Laos, and Cuba – have all rejected full material balance planning in favor a planned economy that includes major roles for markets.¹³

The idea that money is at the root of exploitation of the poor by the rich goes back to long before Jesus threw the money changers out of the temple. Its incarnation among modern anti-capitalists appeared already in the early 19th century in the work of many social critics such as Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, and it continues to this day. Socialists understand that any system of production that has any markets will generate a form of money appropriate for itself, different from money in any different system of production, in order to resolve the coincidence of wants problem inherent to markets. There is no conflict with any of its goals or operating principles that would prevent a socialist system from having money to facilitate exchange, and it would have to have money appropriate for its system if it had markets.

Socialist democracy

The socialist goal that “people become the collective masters of their social institutions” implies democracy, where democracy is understood broadly in the sense one finds in any standard dictionary definition of democracy along the lines of “a process in which all people in a decision-making group participate equally, directly or through representatives they select, in the determination of the group’s choice and its implementation.” Such a socialist democracy is understood to be more democratic than capitalist democracy (also called “bourgeois democracy”) could possibly be for two different reasons. In the first place, under capitalism, “democracy stops at the ‘factory gate’,” where working people spend half their waking hours. Property rights in the means of production that are essential for the process of exploitation, which is the purpose and core of capitalism, mean that decisions on social production are made by the minority of society that owns capital, and not by the whole society, as required by democracy. It is not possible for capitalism to allow all production units to operate democratically, or the first act of the majority workers would likely be to choose to end their exploitation, and that would end capitalism. In the second place, for all to be able to participate equally in decision-making, there cannot be structural power differences among them. In all class societies the ruling class has vastly greater power than the subaltern classes. With its end of exploitation, socialism will be history’s first classless society. As history’s first classless society, socialism will be the first organization of society in human history that can realize this aspect of the greater democracy just defined.

Socialism's requirement of socialist democracy, combined with humanity's collective social species-nature, rejects the incorrect understanding that with socialism the state would "wither away." The correct insight contained within this misunderstanding is that because in any class society the primary function of the state is the oppression of the subaltern by the ruling class, the withering away of classes in socialism will necessarily cause "the state *as it has been*" to wither away. The state, however, also carries out many other roles that are of secondary importance to the ruling class in a class society, but nevertheless are essential for any society to function. Because humans have collective social interests at local, regional, national, and international levels, a socialist society will need to have socialist democratic institutions and procedures for determining and implementing social choices on all those levels. Such institutions *will constitute the various levels of a socialist state* necessary not only for the mechanical operation of a socialist society, but beyond that, for socialism to achieve its goal of making humanity the collective master of its own fate. The question then is what are the necessary social functions a socialist state will have, some of which will be transformations of some analogous necessary functions of capitalist states.

It became common at the end of the last century and into this century to identify the nondemocratic planned economies similar to that of the USSR as Bureaucratic Socialism (or more colloquially, Top-down Socialism), to counterpose them to the desired Democratic Socialism (or Bottom-up or Grassroots Socialism). With this understanding of Bureaucratic Socialism as some (undesirable) form of socialism, this different concept of socialism would correspond to its different goals, and organizational and operational principles.

The expressions Bureaucratic and Top-down Socialism make it clear that people using them favor the term Democratic Socialism. With the definition of the concepts of socialism presented in this chapter, however, planning alone does not make a system of social production socialist. With this understanding of socialism, a system of planned social production is not socialist without socialist democracy, and the terms Bureaucratic or Top-down Socialism are oxymorons. In line with some of the discussions in Post-Soviet Marxism, the term "Industrialization"¹⁴ is appropriate to refer to this type of system of social production. This chapter defines this as "Bureaucratically Planned Industrialization" to appropriately reflect its planned but nonsocialist nature.

The principle of socialist distribution, and the difference from communism¹⁵

The socialist goals of equality, solidarity, and an end to exploitation determine the socialist principle of distribution of the social product: each person gets back from social production goods and services that take the same amount of social labor-time to produce as that person contributes social labor to social production. A common way envisioned for the last two centuries to effect this

has been by giving people labor certificates to indicate how much social labor they contributed, which they then would redeem for any social goods and services created by that same amount of social labor. This concept of distribution is based on a sense of justice, or “fairness,” that people coming out of capitalism can identify with: an exchange of equivalents, getting back from society what you contribute to it. Under capitalism, the exchange of a wage for ownership by the capitalist of what the hired worker produces seems to be fair, but in fact is the source of the exploitation which is the purpose of the capitalist structure of the society. In socialism, on the contrary, that exchange really will be equivalent, and hence fair in this sense. But despite this fundamental improvement, a moment’s reflection from the perspective of human solidarity and our collective species-nature indicates the limitations of this sense of justice. Even in capitalist societies, humanity accepts that some people have greater abilities to contribute to society and some have less, and so to give them all claim on the social product in accord with what they contribute is unfair as measured by what they need as humans to survive and develop their human potential. Generally, contemporary culture considers this way already in (well-functioning) families which interact on the basis of human solidarity. No one would think of giving less food and shelter to a “handicapped” child (who could “contribute less” to the material survival of the family). To the contrary, the family generally expends more resources on those members less able to meet their material needs from their interactions with society outside the family. A communist organization of society then fundamentally distinguishes itself from a socialist society (and considers itself a “higher form of social organization” based on this, based on “more humanly developed humans”) by expanding this inherent human behavior to society as a whole.

Socialism is a more just system than capitalism because people really do get back from society what they contribute to it, unlike capitalism where a part of what they contribute to society is seized by the capitalists for themselves. Communism builds on socialism to go further and achieves a higher, “more human,” sense of justice; everyone gets what they need from society, regardless of their greater or lesser natural ability to contribute more or less to society with the same effort.¹⁶

Conclusion

A concept of socialism is determined by its conception of human nature, its goals, and the various organizational and operational principles on what is necessary to achieve those goals. Different concepts of socialism have enough in common to establish a broad concept of socialism, analogous to the concept of capitalism. The goals and organizational principles of socialism differentiate it from other ways of organizing social production and society like capitalism, and they also establish the “fuzzy boundaries” between different concepts

of socialism. Both social planning of social production and a socialist democracy, that is more democratic than capitalist or bourgeois democracy, are integral to the concept of Democratic Planned Socialism.

Notes

- 1 The concept of socialism elaborated here is exactly the opposite of this characterization, in that it argues it will provide more freedom, more democracy, more material well-being, more variety, more personal choice, and so on.
- 2 The word “men” was almost universally preferentially used as a synonym for “people” or “humanity” until the end of the twentieth century, when the rise of awareness of, and concern with, the myriad ways society conceptualizes women as second class humans changed this usage.
- 3 On the one hand, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels were just two among thousands of advocates of socialism. On the other hand, over the course of the 20th century, they became its best-known advocates, notwithstanding that this author holds that the majority of people who considered themselves advocates of Marx and Engels’ ideas of socialism and communism misrepresented their ideas, from slightly to fundamentally. This section emphasizes that these two “background socialist assumptions” have been present at least since the birth of modern socialist thought in the first part of the 19th century. This is the fundamental reason, in addition to its clarity, for referencing their work here. Given the extreme prestige of their work among many advocates of socialism, however, it is important to stress that their work is *not* being referenced as “the revealed truth concerning socialism,” as their ideas are too often presented.
- 4 For one very readable documentation of the extensive breakdown of organizations promoting social connectedness in the United States over the last half century, see *Bowling Alone* (Putnam 2020).
- 5 Equivalently this can be referred to as “Robinson Crusoe individualism,” for obvious reasons.
- 6 For a further discussion of this issue of if a policy promotes to a chosen goal when it supports one subgoal and harms another, in general and in the case of building socialism in Cuba, see Campbell (2021).
- 7 Note that capitalists being humans do plan their actions, with their goal being to maximize their individual profits. The mechanical summation of these decisions that establishes what social production will be, however, does not constitute social planning by society of what it wishes to produce.
- 8 This excludes people who often self-identify as “socialist” who advocate social democratic capitalism, municipal socialism, or other such particular systems of capitalism linked to particularly strong redistributive schemes.
- 9 Specifically, by a number of different variations of what became known as the “material balance” system.
- 10 As opposed to the tool of mandated delivery of material balances.
- 11 Markets have existed in the core of all except the very simplest modes of production throughout history: feudalism, Greece and Rome, imperial China, even in Sumer 5000 years ago.
- 12 Capitalist exploitation is the result of workers receiving less value in wages than the value of their production, the difference which the capitalists expropriate.
- 13 The Democratic People’s Republic of Korea still uses a variant of twentieth-century materials balance planning and production system that, notwithstanding its economic successes in certain countries in certain time periods, is today nearly universally evaluated as inadequate and inappropriate for building socialism by socialists.

- 14 Productive systems where society's surplus labor is not controlled by society (all class societies) are generally named in accord with the use of that surplus – capitalism to expand capital, feudalism to maintain the feudal operation of society, and so on. The bulk of the social surplus in the USSR from 1930 to 1991 was used to promote a planned and non-capitalist industrialization. Hence this name. See, for example, Tikhonov (2021) on the discussion in Post-Soviet Russian Marxism on the Soviet system of social production.
- 15 As the modern concepts of socialism and communism developed over the course of the 19th century, the usage of those labels varied extensively between authors, and from one time period to another. The distinction indicated here was clearly established only in the early 1890s, after which it has been very widely, but not universally, used to the present.
- 16 For the first concise formulation of this difference between a human-centered classless society initially emerging from capitalism (socialism) and a still “more human” society (communism) to arise out of socialism, see Marx (1875: 86). Note that this understanding of the appropriateness for a human-centered society to distribute goods according to need (but without planning of social production or democracy) was already specifically elaborated long before the rise of modern socialist thought, in the first modern utopian work by Sir Thomas More in 1516 (More 1516).

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