

DOUBLING DOWN ON DUTY

Socialism's Most Famous Saying Has an Evil Twin

“

'To each according to their work' is what we are fighting for, and ... 'to each according to their needs' is our inspiration and ultimate destination.

—DAVID S. PENA

”



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Socialism's Most Famous Saying Has an Evil Twin

The central role compulsory duty plays in socialist philosophy is made clear by the fact socialism has not one, but two versions of its most important axiom.

This is far and away the most famous of socialist sayings:

From each according to their ability, to each according to their need.¹

Perform socialism's duty to give your abilities—your time and talents—to society; in exchange, you will freely receive whatever you need.

For over 150 years, thousands of socialists have repeated this phrase and claimed their philosophy will make it a reality. They still do today. For example, in *Imagine: Living in a Socialist USA*, Michael Steven Smith writes that under socialism,

the rule will become “from each according to their ability, to each according to their need.”²

Not *might* become or *could* become. The rule *will* become. Socialism *will* deliver on what noted socialists like Michael Harrington, the founder of the Democratic Socialists of America, say is their philosophy's defining promise.³

In “On Justice Under Socialism,” Edward and Onara Nell describe this axiom as

a capsule summary of the socialist approach to distributing the burdens and benefits of life.⁴

The *benefit* is receiving all goods and services you need, and receiving them for free.⁵ The *burden* is the duty to labor for society to the extent of your ability and independent of what you need.

It's likely you've already heard the expression “from each according to their ability, to each according to their need”—and probably multiple times at that. This motto plays a central role in the marketing of socialism.

But did you know there's an alternate version of this saying?

A SECOND VERSION

The second version of socialism's most famous axiom is not nearly as well known. As Bernard Bykhovsky explains, it's

the socialist motto "from each according to his ability, to each according to his work."⁶

This alternate version is obviously identical to the first with a single exception: "need" has been replaced by "work."

Swapping one word results in a radical change to socialism's promise. Receiving based on our needs means receiving goods and services independent of our work. The alternate version of socialism's most famous axiom cancels this pledge.

This second saying doesn't represent some different version of socialism. It's another aspect of the same philosophy and appears frequently in the writings of socialist thinkers. Take, respectively, the words of Fidel Castro, John Roemer, Bertell Ollman, Leo Huberman, and David Pena:

We are in the socialist phase of the revolution in which ... the type of distribution needed is the one set forth by Marx in his program "from each according to his abilities, to each according to his work."⁷

The historical task of the socialist revolution is to bring about a regime where each labors according to his ability and is paid according to his work.⁸

[Eventually] socialism can be organized according to the principle "From each according to his ability, to each according to his work."⁹

From each according to his ability, to each according to his deeds.¹⁰

"From each according to their abilities, to each according to their work" is what we are fighting for, and "From each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs" is our inspiration and ultimate destination.¹¹

The "work" version even appears in the constitutions of socialist nations. Here it is in the 1977 Constitution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR):

The state exercises control over the measure of labour and of consumption in accordance with the principle of socialism: "From

each according to his ability, to each according to his work". *Socially useful work and its results determine a person's status in Society.*¹²

The benefits portion of this second creed is at complete odds with the promise of each receiving "according to their need." But there's another aspect of these two sayings that's entirely in sync.

DUTY: THE COMMON DENOMINATOR

Both versions of socialism's central axiom begin with "from each according to their ability."

The first half of each is the compulsory duty of socialism. Louis Blanc, who developed this saying over 170 years ago, employs italics and all caps for emphasis, explaining:

The more one *can*, the more one *must*.... Thus, the axiom: From each according to their ability. That is the DUTY.¹³

Duty is what a person must do. It's a requirement. In its prescription of duties, socialism rejects the political philosophy that underpins liberal democracies—countries like Canada, France, Japan, and the United States

Liberal philosophy values each person by protecting the rights of the individual. It makes individuals the owners of their own lives and the time in them. It rejects mandatory duty to others—be they king, queen, fascists calling themselves "the community,"¹⁴ or socialists calling themselves "society." Why? Because such duty gives others the dangerous power to control our lives without our express consent.

Socialism flips the script. It says the purpose of our lives is to perform our "humble function in the great social machine."¹⁵ It says we'll find happiness

The Ripple Effects of Duty

The central role compulsory duty plays in socialist thought is vividly illustrated by the fact it has not one, but two key axioms that start with the duty of "from each according to their ability."

This fact is also reflected by the impact socialism's love of duty has had on the entirety of socialist thought. Socialism's foundation on duty has rippled out to shape—to contaminate—much of socialist philosophy. As the graphic at the end of this paper illustrates, one aspect of socialist thought after another is a byproduct of the fact socialism starts with duty.

To learn more, see the RFP paper, "The Ripple Effects of Socialist Duty."

being “conscious cogs.”¹⁶ Socialism’s requirement that we give our abilities to society both results from and reinforces these core socialist principles.

Thus, we find that both versions of socialism’s defining axiom start with the duty of “from each according to their ability.” This is also the starting point of socialism itself, but it’s the aspect that’s often overlooked when socialists focus our attention on the appealing promise of “to each according to their need.”

WHY A SECOND VERSION?

Edward and Onara Nell describe the socialist motto as “a capsule summary of the socialist approach to distributing the burdens and benefits of life.”¹⁷ As the Nells alert us, there’s a link between the burden and benefit halves of the saying. One would fairly assume that the two halves have a contingent relationship with each other. That is to say, it’s reasonable to assume that

1. if you fail to give society your full abilities, then you have no right to expect society to give to you according to your needs; and
2. if society doesn’t give to you according to your needs, then society would have no right to demand your abilities.

It’s certainly clear that socialism plans for the first of these conditional relationships to be true. Socialist theory dictates that if you don’t give your full abilities to society, the only thing you should expect in return is to be treated like a thief.

To socialism, slacking is theft; failing to give your full time and talents to society is tantamount to stealing from it. That’s why so many prominent socialist philosophers attack slackers as “thieves,” “parasites,” and “exploiters.”¹⁸ As one example of the dozens available, Henri Saint-Simon writes:

They are slackers, that is to say thieves.¹⁹

So, the first contingent relationship holds true. But what about the second?

If socialism fails to deliver on the promised benefit of “to each according to their need,” does that cancel the requirement to give society control of our time and talents?

No, it doesn’t. The failure of socialism to deliver its part of the bargain doesn’t change the socialist demand for duty in any way.

The socialist plan is for us to be under the thumb of duty no matter what. *This is the reason socialism has an alternate version of its most important axiom.*

In fact, socialists know that the “to each according to their need” version they sell will *never* be the basis of a first phase of socialist society. And they know that the promise of a world based on “to each according to their need” is likely to remain unfulfilled for centuries, if not for eternity. But socialism requires the duty of “from each according to their ability” to function independent of what, if anything, we are given in return.

Voila! The alternate version is born.

TWO THINGS KNOWLEDGABLE SOCIALISTS KNOW

1. The initial phase of socialism will require mandatory duty without distribution based on need.
2. A world of “to each according to their need” is currently impossible and may well always be.

As we’ll detail below, knowledgeable socialists recognize there are two reasons socialism could *never* start based on the famous saying that promises “to each according to their need.” First, they know that an initial phase of socialism based on mandatory duty *without distribution based on need* is an explicit element of socialist philosophy. Second, they know that—merely based on production volumes—a world of “to each according to their need” is currently impossible and may well always be.

These are the reasons that, after more than two decades of socialism in Cuba, Cuban leader Fidel Castro gave an interview in which he explained:

We in Cuba are still laying the first bricks of socialism. We live according to the formula which stipulates: From each according to his ability, to each according to his work. We cannot escape from this principle, regardless of how much we may dream about that other one.²⁰

“That other” principle that’s only a dream is, of course, the one that promises a world of “to each according to their need.”

Castro died in 2016, thirty-five years after this speech. After three additional decades laying the bricks of socialism, Cuba had not realized the “to each according to their need” dream and was, if anything, further away from doing so.²¹

NON-OPTIONAL

The primary reason for the second version of the socialist motto is a simple one. Even though most non-socialists are unfamiliar with this alternate version, socialist theory requires it.

Socialists say socialism is to have two phases: a first phase after capitalism followed by a second, perfected phase. It was Karl Marx who made this plan socialist gospel.

Marx said that the “to each according to their need” standard would apply in what he called a “higher phase” of socialism.²² This second stage would only come to pass *if* the first phase (that does *not* use the “to each according to their need” standard) was successful in both reconstructing society along socialist lines and dramatically boosting worldwide production of every needed good and service.

And how would the first phase operate? How would it accomplish this radical restructuring of society (for example, by making an untold number of “parasitic” jobs illegal and transferring those who perform them to alternate tasks)? How would it achieve a dramatic increase in the production of needed goods?

By using the power of compulsory duty, that’s how. The expectation of a society based on duty is what’s behind socialists’ belief that they could overhaul society in such a way as to open the wormhole to socialism’s much-promised, never-seen higher phase.

That the first phase of socialism would be based on the use of compulsory duty is hardly surprising. Socialism starts from the premise that such a duty is morally correct, no matter what socialism delivers in return. Moreover, socialism has been designed so that mandatory duty is required for socialism to operate (which is itself unsurprising given the socialist belief in the morality of duty).

Thus, the first phase of socialist society without question requires an alternate version of socialism’s most famous saying—one that demands duty but does not deliver on the basis of need. Knowledgeable socialists are fully aware of this sleight of hand, even as they pitch the “to each according to their need” formula that would be used *if* this initial stage of socialism were able to create Marx’s “higher phase.”

BEAM ME UP, SCOTTY KARL

There’s a second reason that socialism has an alternate version of its most famous saying. It requires this alternate version because there’s good cause to doubt that worldwide production volumes could *ever* be boosted to the levels required to deliver on socialism’s promise of “to each according to their need.”

“To each according to their need” is no modest proposal. Socialist philosophy says that in such a world, every good and service humans need would be so massively available that it could be taken for free, with some even leftover for a rainy day. The world’s population would be able to take everything they need for free forever and “according to self-defined needs.”²³

Every needed thing. Free. For all. Worldwide. Forever. This is how socialists have long defined the meaning of “to each according to their need.” The quantity of goods and services produced worldwide today doesn’t come anywhere close to permitting a world based on this standard.

What’s produced today isn’t anywhere near sufficient to permit a world of “to each according to their need,” even if

- we made the absurd assumption that the transition to socialism would not result in massive disruption to the world economy; and
- we made the counterfactual assumption that this new socialist society would avoid the dramatic loss of productivity relative to capitalism that has characterized all prior socialist experiments (causing them to collapse or to return to capitalist economics while preserving the socialist dictatorship).²⁴

Socialist theory explains that a world of “to each according to their need” requires an oversupply of needed goods and services.²⁵ And creating this oversupply by definition requires overproduction. Thus, a world of “to each according to their need” necessitates non-stop, worldwide overproduction.

And it isn’t just a matter of a small oversupply. No, as Karl Marx explains, to create a world based on “to each according to their need,” there must be not only a supply that exceeds demand, but also a significant additional oversupply that acts as an insurance policy. This over-oversupply (created by over-overproduction) would permit socialist citizens to continue taking as they need despite natural disasters, pandemics, and other unexpected events that disrupt production.²⁶

The Secret Sauce of Socialism

Socialism promises a world based on the saying “to each according to their need” — a world in which every good and service humans need is available free to all forever.

Socialist thinkers tell us there’s a special ingredient required to cook up such a world: “abundance” achieved through “constant over-production.”

Talk of “constant over-production” yielding “abundance,” “superabundance,” and “opulent abundance” used to be at the center of the socialist sales pitch. Today, it’s socialism’s secret sauce.

To learn more, see the RFP paper “The Socialist Obsession.”

The odds of achieving this world of what Marx called “constant over-production” and “perpetual relative over-production” would be incredibly long even without the ecological emergency we’re facing. The climate crisis makes the never-ending overproduction required to create a world of “to each according to their need” less likely than ever—and even immoral.²⁷

Maybe in some Star Trek-style future, the limitless resources needed for a world of “to each according to their need” will somehow become a reality. But there’s not even a glimmer of a hope this world could come to pass in your lifetime.

Even if a socialist society was founded tomorrow, you would live forever under the whip of duty but *not* receive according to need. You would live the rest of your life in a society based on the alternate version of socialism’s most important axiom—the version the majority of socialists forget to mention when they make their sales pitch.

BAIT AND SWITCH?

Before reading this paper, did you know socialism had a second version of its most famous saying—a version that puts us under compulsory duty but jettisons the promise to distribute according to need? It would be no surprise if you did not.

Some socialists do what ethical selling requires: when they speak about “to each according to their need,” they make it clear that this is a distant dream and potential impossibility. They explain the little-known alternate version of socialism’s key axiom and its requirement of compulsory duty despite not providing goods based on need. They make it clear that this is the version that would apply unless a first phase of socialist society dramatically boosted worldwide production despite the climate crisis.

But honest explanations of this sort are the exceptions, not the rule. They’re exceptions that prove the rule—the rule being that the explanations most socialists provide fall far short of what full and honest disclosure demands.

Far too many socialists sell their philosophy as a system that *will* be based on “to each according to their need” and give the impression socialism would deliver on this promise in our lifetime. They do this to convince us that the dangers posed by socialism’s foundation on compulsory duty to society are worth the risk. But when they do, they’re fully aware that what socialism would actually mean is a world based on “from each according to their ability” but *not* on “to each according to their need.”

Every socialist who sells “to each according to their need” without making the full story clear engages in unethical selling of the worst sort. They promise one thing while fully intending to deliver another—a bait and switch.

"AN INEXORABLE LAW IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF SOCIALISM"

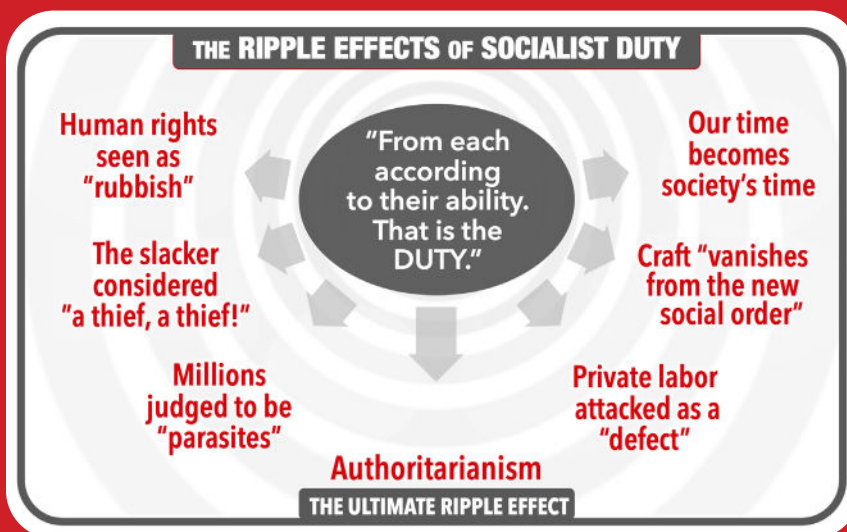
The central role compulsory duty plays in socialist philosophy is made clear by the fact socialism has not one, but two versions of its most important axiom. It has two versions in order to guarantee that all would be born owing their abilities to society no matter what socialism gives them in return.

Fidel Castro explains:

That everyone contribute according to his ability, that each one receive according to his work is a principle, an inexorable law in the construction of socialism.²⁸

Is the inexorable law of socialism that it will deliver on its famous promise of "to each according to their need"? No, it isn't. It's anything but. For our lifetime, if not for eternity, anyone living in a socialist society will be ruled by the alternate version Castro speaks of: owing duty but not receiving based on need.

There's only one thing that's inexorable—inevitable, unavoidable, unescapable—about socialism: all will be made to perform its dangerous and anti-liberal duty of "from each according to their ability."



To learn more about the ripple effects of socialist duty, visit redflagspress.org/ripple

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1. French socialist Louis Blanc is generally credited with, in the 1840s, creating the specific wording for socialism's most famous saying, "From each according to his ability, to each according to his need," though another French socialist, Étienne Cabet, also began using this expression at roughly the same time. However, what cemented this saying's place as socialist saying number one was Karl Marx's adopting it as his own, writing that socialist society would eventually "inscribe on its banners, 'From each according to his ability, to each according to his need'" (Karl Marx, "Critique of the Gotha Program," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert Tucker [New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1972], 383).

Here is one instance of Blanc using the saying in the 1840s: "Chacun produise selon son aptitude et ses forces, que chacun consomme selon ses besoins." Louis Blanc, *Nouveau discours de M. Louis Blanc sur l'organisation du travail devant l'assemblée générale des délégués des travailleurs* (Paris: Commission du Gouvernement Pour Travailleurs, 1848), 10.

2. Michael Steven Smith, "Law in a Socialist USA," in *Imagine: Living in a Socialist USA*, ed. Frances Goldin, Debby Smith, and Michael Steven Smith (New York: Harper Perennial, 2014), 58.

3. Democratic Socialists of America founder Michael Harrington says that the goal of today's socialism remains creating a society based on socialism's 170-year-old formula, "from each according to their ability, to each according to their need" (Michael Harrington, "What Socialists Would Do in America—If They Could" *Dissent*, Fall 1978, 445). Harrington also makes it clear that he considers this socialism's defining promise. He writes that "if abundance is not possible, then neither is socialism, and there's no reformulation that can avoid that fact" (Michael Harrington, *Socialism* [New York: Saturday Review Press, 1970], 347).

Harrington says that socialism is impossible without "abundance." In socialist theory, "abundance" has a specific meaning. It means such massive production of goods and services that they can be provided to the world's population for free, fulfilling the promise of "to each according to their need." In socialist theory, a world of "abundance" is the precondition for a world based on "to each according to their need."

Harrington tells us that socialism itself is impossible without a world of abundance—in other words, without a world that boosts production levels massively, making it possible to fulfill socialism's promise of "to each according to their needs." As Harrington explains, if achieving this goal is impossible, then so is socialism, "and there is no reformulation that can avoid this fact." Thus, achieving socialism is itself defined by achieving a world based on "to each according to their needs."

See the RFP paper "The Secret Sauce of Socialism" for a detailed look at how socialists say "abundance" and, as Karl Marx put it, "constant over-production" are required for socialism to create a world of "to each according to their need."

4. Edward Nell and Onara Nell, "On Justice under Socialism," *Dissent*, Summer 1972.

5. Here are two examples of socialists explaining that "to each according to their needs" means free everything for all forever: John Crump explains that "to each according to their needs" means that "people will be free to take whatever they choose ... without making payment" (John Crump, "The Thin Red Line: Non-Market Socialism in the Twentieth Century," in *Non-Market Socialism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, ed. Maximilien Rubel and John Crump [London: Macmillan Press, 1987], 43). Tatah Mentah

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- explains: “Individuals will have free access to what is produced according to self-defined needs” (Tatah Mentah, *Socialism: The Only Practical Alternative to Contemporary Capitalism* [Mankon: Langaa Research and Publishing, 2012], 36.)
6. Bernard Bykhovsky, *The Individual and Society* (Moscow: Novosty Press Agency Publishing House, 1965), 25.
 7. Fidel Castro, “Fidel Castro Speaks at Moncada Anniversary Ceremonies [July 27, 1973],” Castro Speech Database, accessed December 17, 2020, <http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/castro/db/1973/19730727.html>.
 8. John E. Roemer, *Egalitarian Perspectives: Essays in Philosophical Economics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 28.
 9. Bertell Ollman, “Market Mystification in Capitalist and Market Socialist Societies,” in *Market Socialism: The Debate among Socialists*, ed. Bertell Ollman (New York: Routledge, 1998), 117.
 10. Leo Huberman, *The Truth about Socialism* (New York: Lear Publishers, 1950), 198.
 11. David S. Pena, “You Might Be a Marxist If ... You Believe in From Each According to Their Abilities, to Each According to Their Needs,” *Political Affairs*, April 4, 2011, captured by the Internet Archive, May 1, 2021, <https://web.archive.org/web/20210310131119/http://www.politicalaffairs.net/you-might-be-a-marxist-if-you-believe-in-from-each-according-to-their-abilities-to-each-according-to-their-needs/>.
 12. 1977 U.S.S.R. Const. ch. 1 art. 14, Bucknell University, accessed December 17, 2020, <https://www.departments.bucknell.edu/russian/const/77cons01.html#chap01>. Emphasis added.
 13. “Plus un homme peut, plus il doit. ... D’où l’axiome: De chacun, selon ses facultés. Là est le DEVOIR.” Louis Blanc, *La Histoire de la Révolution de 1848* (Paris: C. Marpon, 1880), 1:148.
 14. Nazi leader Adolph Hitler was particularly fond of referring to “the community.” For example, he references “the community” dozens of times in his notorious work *Mein Kampf* (“My Struggle”). Adolph Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1943).
 15. Sidney Webb, one of the founders of the noted British socialist organization the Fabian Society, writes: “The perfect and fitting development of each individual is not necessarily the utmost and highest cultivation of his own personality, but the filling, in the best possible way, of his humble function in the great social machine.” Sidney Webb, “The Historic Basis of Socialism,” in *Fabian Essays in Socialism*, ed. Bernard Shaw and H. G. Wilshire (New York: Humboldt Publishing Co., 1891), 38.
 16. Socialist great Ernesto “Che” Guevara says that socialism will bring us happiness: “Man once again regains the old sense of happiness in work, the happiness of fulfilling a duty, of feeling himself important within the social mechanism. He becomes happy to feel himself a cog in the wheel, a cog which has its own characteristics and is necessary although not indispensable, to the production process, a conscious cog.” Ernest “Che” Guevara, “On Creating a New Attitude” (August 15, 1964), in *Venceremos! The Speeches and Writings of Che Guevara*, ed. John Gerassi (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968), 337.
 17. Nell and Nell, “On Justice under Socialism,” 483.
 18. To see numerous examples of socialist greats attacking slackers as “thieves,” “parasites,” and “exploiters” and learn more about the reasons they do, see the RFP paper “Why Socialism Says Slacking Is Theft.”
 19. “Il y a des fainéants, c’est-à-dire des voleurs.” Henri de Saint Simon, *Œuvres de Saint-Simon & d’Enfantin* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1868), 18:130. “Le fainéant” is, in today’s English, “the slacker.”
 20. Fidel Castro, “Julio Scherer Garcia Interview with Fidel Castro [*Mexico City Proceso*, September 21, 1981],” Castro Speech Database, accessed April 3, 2020, <http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/castro/db/1981/19810921.html>.

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21. How could socialist Cuba be even further away from achieving the dream of a socialist society based on “to each according to their needs” after thirty-five additional years of laying “the bricks of socialism”? Because humankind evolves and develops new needs. What counts as a need doesn’t stand still, as Karl Marx himself recognized and endorsed, promising that a socialist society was to be one that supplied a rich and growing set of needs, not a society based on rationing and in which the government defines needs. (For details on Marx’s views, see the RFP paper “The Secret Sauce of Socialism.”)

Over the course of the decades following Castro’s speech, capitalist society raised the bar in terms of human needs, developing a number of new products that improved our lives. These represented yet more products that socialist Cuba did not deliver to its citizenry, thereby pushing Cuba even further away from achieving the goal of “to each according to their need” than it had been when Castro spoke in 1981.

For example, in August 1981, a month before the Castro gave the speech in which this quote appears, the very first IBM PC was released. Soon, in capitalist society, personal computers were ubiquitous, making a fundamental difference in our lives. Consider just this one of the many dramatically positive results of the personal computing revolution: the word-processing application with an undo function replacing the typewriter with its carbon paper and Wite-Out.

How did socialist Cuba do when it came to supplying its citizens with personal computers? In Cuba, owning a personal computer was *illegal* until 2008! That’s twenty-seven years—an entire generation—after the IBM PC was released. By 2008, hundreds of millions of individuals in capitalist society owned personal computers. And when computers finally became legal and available to purchase in Cuba, they were far more expensive than their capitalist equivalents, suppressing their adoption. See Mark Frank, “Cuba lifts ban on computer and DVD player sales,” *Reuters*, March 13, 2008, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-cuba-reforms/cuba-lifts-ban-on-computer-and-dvd-player-sales-idUSN1329909720080313>.

22. “In a *higher phase* of communist society, after the enslaving subordination of individuals under division of labour, and therewith also the antithesis between mental and physical labour, has vanished ; after labour, from a mere means of life, has itself become the prime necessity of life ; after the productive forces have also increased with the all-round development of the individual, and all the springs of co-operative wealth flow more abundantly—only then can the narrow horizon of bourgeois right be fully left behind and society inscribe on its banners ; from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs.” Marx, “Critique of the Gotha Program,” 383. Emphasis added.

Note that Marx refers to a “higher phase of communist society.” As socialists report themselves, Marx used the terms “socialism” and “communism” interchangeably and did not distinguish between them. As this is the way Marx used these two words, it’s the way most knowledgeable socialists do also. And, as Marx is considered a democratic socialist, one can obviously be a democratic socialist while also considering oneself a communist as Marx did. To learn more, see the RFP papers “Socialism? Communism? What’s the Difference?” and “Karl Marx: ‘Democratic Socialist.’”

23. Mentah, *Socialism*, 36.

24. Actual attempts to implement socialist economics have demonstrated that it suppresses productivity and overall production rather than boosting it dramatically as socialist theory assumes. The socialist critique of capitalism led socialists to believe not only that socialism would boost production relative to capitalism but also that, when socialist society took over from the “anarchy” of capitalism, running the socialist economy would be a piece of cake. Running the socialist economy was going to be “as easy as play” and would amount to “extraordinarily simple operations” involving nothing more than knowing “the four rules of arithmetic.” So claimed even such socialist greats as August Bebel and Vladimir Lenin:

“In a socialized society matters are fully regulated; society is held in fraternal bonds. Everything is done in order; there, it is an easy matter to gauge demand. With a little experience, the thing *is easy as play*.” August Bebel, *Woman Under Socialism*, trans. Daniel De Leon (New York: Schocken, 1971), 278. Emphasis added.

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“The accounting and control necessary for this [‘setting up the functioning’ of production in socialist society] have been simplified by capitalism to an extreme and reduced to the *extraordinarily simple operations*—which any literate person can perform—of checking and recording, *knowledge of the four rules of arithmetic*, and issuing receipts.” Vladimir Lenin, *The State and Revolution*, 2nd ed. (London: Laurence and Wishart, 1943), 117–18. Emphasis added.

The staggering misunderstanding of economics at the heart of socialist theory ended up costing tens of millions their lives. For example, the so-called Great Leap Forward in socialist China resulted in the deaths of tens of millions—the vast majority by starvation. For details, see Frank Dikötter, *Mao’s Great Famine: The History of China’s Most Devastating Catastrophe, 1958–1962* (New York: Walker and Co., 2010).

A present-day example of the negative results of socialist economics is found in Venezuela. Writing in the *New York Times*, reporter Anatoly Kurmanaev explains: “Venezuela’s fall is the single largest economic collapse outside of war in at least 45 years” with gross domestic product dropping by over 60 percent from 2013 to 2019. Anatoly Kurmanaev, “Venezuela’s Collapse Is the Worst Outside of War in Decades, Economists Say,” *New York Times*, May 17, 2019, [nytimes.com/2019/05/17/world/americas/venezuela-economy.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/17/world/americas/venezuela-economy.html).

25. Socialist theory explains that creating a world based on “to each according to their need” requires a state of “abundance”—a state in which there is supply that exceeds demand. With the exception of a handful of things (like air) that are abundantly available in nature, all other goods and services must be overproduced to create the oversupply required for free distribution of goods. It’s essential to also recall that socialist theory says *every* good and service is to be free. Bread isn’t going to be made abundant by suppressing production of beer (which is made from the same ingredients as bread). Rather, bread and beer and every other needed thing are to all be overproduced and thus free.

In this passage, Karl Marx explains that until the quantity available exceeds demand, it will always remain a scarce product: “Take a product that is more than scarce, unique of its kind if you will: this unique product will be more than abundant, it will be superfluous, if there is no demand for it. On the other hand, take a product multiplied into millions, it will always be scarce if it does not satisfy the demand, that is, if there is too great a demand.” Karl Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1954), 37.

26. In the second volume of his famous *Capital*, Marx speaks of socialist society requiring “constant over-production” and “perpetual relative over-production” as a form of insurance against “unusual destruction caused by accidents and natural forces.” He says that “over-production of this kind is equivalent to control by the [socialist] society over the objective means of its own reproduction.” Karl Marx, *Capital*, trans. Ben Fowkes and David Fernbach, 3 vols. (London: Penguin Classics, 1978–1981), 3:256–57, 544.

27. Socialists today live by the motto “system change not climate change” and argue that climate change makes socialism necessary. See, for example, Martin Empson, ed., “System Change not Climate Change: A Revolutionary Response to Environmental Crisis” (London: Bookmarks Publications, 2019). The reality is that there hasn’t been a single problem for the last two centuries that socialists didn’t claim their philosophy was the solution to. But claiming that socialism is the solution to climate change is particularly unethical because climate change makes socialism effectively impossible. Socialist theory says that socialism is literally impossible unless a world of “abundance” (what socialists have also referred to as “superabundance,” “opulent abundance,” and “limitless abundance” and what Marx called “constant over-production”) can be achieved. For details, see the RFP paper “The Secret Sauce of Socialism.”

28. Fidel Castro, “Fidel Castro Addresses Cuban Workers Congress [November 16, 1973],” Castro Speech Database, accessed June 15, 2020, <http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/castro/db/1973/19731116.html>.