

IT'S ONLY SOCIALISM IF IT DOESN'T BLOW UP

Examining the Claim "Socialism Has Never Been Tried"

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Russia never was socialist.

—EDITORS OF THE SOCIALIST STANDARD

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Socialism hasn't failed; it hasn't been tried—yet!

—PERRY SANDERS AND DIANNA SITAR

————— ” —————



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Examining the Claim "Socialism Has Never Been Tried"

Uncorrectable defects in the socialist product force those selling it to make silly arguments.

The Russian Revolution in 1917 led to the formation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (the USSR). Socialists around the globe proclaimed the USSR not only the world's first socialist regime but also its first genuine democracy.

American socialist Eugene Debs is celebrated as a democratic socialist icon. In 1918, Debs expressed what would be the common opinion of socialists for decades to come¹ when he praised Bolshevik leaders Vladimir Lenin and Leon Trotsky, along with their allies, stating,

They have laid the foundation of the first real democracy that ever drew the breath of life in this world.²

The centennial of the Russian Revolution came in 2017. An editorial in the *Socialist Standard* marked the anniversary by summarizing the very different claim that socialists make today. Its title:

"1917 – 2017 Russia Never Was Socialist"³

Get that? Not "Russia represented a defective form of socialism, and we've since fixed the flaws." Not even "Russia started out socialist but veered off course." No, "Russia *never was* socialist."

Similarly, noted socialists Adam Buick and Hillel Ticktin, respectively, write of the USSR:

Countries such as Russia were not socialist.⁴

It was obviously not socialist in any sense.⁵

Rather than expressing disappointment that socialism in the USSR turned out to be a totalitarian horror that cost millions their lives, today's socialists attempt to erase it from the record books.

And the USSR is only one of the many disastrous socialist experiments that get the "not socialist" treatment. Essentially every socialist government has been praised

at its inception as democratic socialism drawing “the breath of life.” But when the authoritarianism of these states becomes indefensible, the go-to line is that they weren’t socialist at all. As the International Socialist Organization claims:

China and Cuba, like the former Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc, have nothing to do with socialism.⁶

Similarly, an article in the *Socialist Standard* argues that neither Cuba nor the USSR was socialist. What Cuban revolutionary Fidel Castro *really* did was create a

form of state capitalism like the one established by the Bolsheviks [in the USSR], and called it socialism.⁷

In other words, the leaders of these countries were con artists who “called it socialism” when they were actually creating a “form of state capitalism”—or so today’s socialists want us to believe.

This is the reasoning behind today’s catch-all excuse for socialism’s awful record, often framed with the words, “Socialism has never been tried.” Numerous socialist-authored papers make this claim, bearing titles like:

- “Socialism Has Never Been Tried”⁸
- “Socialism Hasn’t Failed; It Hasn’t Been Tried—Yet!”⁹
- “The Myth of Twentieth-Century Socialism”¹⁰

Russia, China, Cuba, and the dozens of other explicitly socialist governments¹¹ that arose in the last century? All apparently a “myth.” That would come as quite a surprise to Che Guevara and others like him—bona fide socialist revolutionaries who committed their lives to what they believed was a genuine socialist movement.

All of this “socialism hasn’t been tried” posturing is nothing more than a retroactive sales ploy. And there are three important things that we can learn from it.

First, it is, frankly, an attempt by modern-day socialists to avoid responsibility for the oppression and death their philosophy has caused—an attempt premised on an absurd fallacy: that only a *successful* socialist society can be counted as a real one.

Second, it highlights how socialists employ the tactics of unethical manufacturers, blaming user error instead of taking responsibility for a bad product.

Third, and most important, it reveals a concrete danger from today’s socialism. Why do today’s socialists contend that “Socialism has never been tried” instead of arguing

that “Our socialism is a new version redesigned to eliminate the problems of the past”? It’s because the defects in the socialist product have not been fixed.

In fact, they *cannot* be. The flaws that have turned one socialist society after another into authoritarian disasters are intrinsic to the product. These irreparable defects mean the constant cycle of socialists promising democracy yet delivering despotism will never be broken.

IT’S ONLY OUR ROCKET IF IT DOESN’T BLOW UP

A SpaceX rocket blasts off on a mission to place a satellite in orbit. Company spokespeople applaud the launch as a great success.

But soon the rocket’s ascent goes awry. A flaw in its design causes it to spiral off course and explode. How do the spokespeople respond now?

Imagine if SpaceX founder Elon Musk claimed that the failed rocket wasn’t a SpaceX one. His “logic”? SpaceX rockets perform as promised. Since this one exploded, it must not have been a SpaceX rocket.

In other words: it’s only a SpaceX rocket if it doesn’t blow up.

This is an absurd argument, obviously. And claims that authoritarian socialist societies shouldn’t count as socialist are equally absurd. They’re tantamount to saying, “It’s only socialism if it doesn’t blow up.”

Today’s socialists effectively maintain that only *successful* socialism should count as socialism; socialism that fails should not. And since no socialist society has succeeded, they farcically assert, “Socialism has never been tried.”

The primary method by which socialists attempt to dismiss the disasters of the socialist past takes advantage of the fact that socialists have long equated socialism and democracy. For over 150 years, socialists have maintained that *socialism* is essentially synonymous with *democracy*.

Socialists use this equation of socialism with democracy to argue that earlier socialist societies were not socialist, because they were not democratic. For example, the basis for Adam Buick’s conclusion that “countries such as Russia were not socialist” is his belief that

socialism could only be democratic.¹²

Arguing that “socialism could only be democratic” is equivalent to arguing “SpaceX rockets can only be successful.” A successful democracy, like a successful rocket launch, is a goal, not a given.

Nathan Robinson similarly writes:

Socialism is a term for economic democracy, so an undemocratic system doesn't deserve to claim the name.¹³

Our hypothetical Elon Musk might equally say, “‘SpaceX rocket’ is a term for a successful rocket, so a rocket that explodes doesn't deserve to claim the name.”

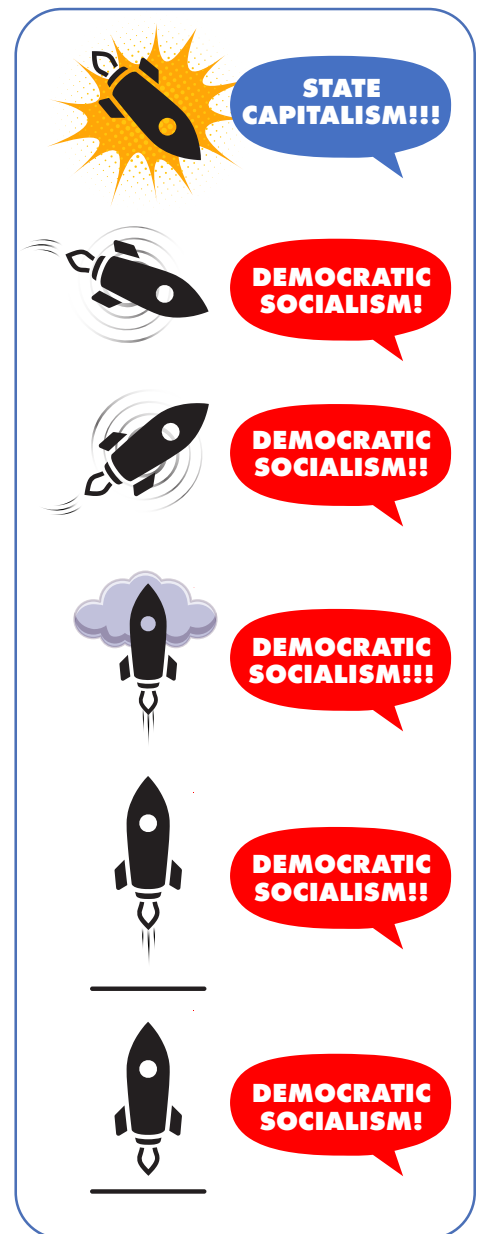
Buick and Robinson are no doubt sincere in their belief that socialism should be democratic. So what? Eugene Debs and thousands of other socialists were equally sincere when they promised the USSR was the world's first democracy. It's not sincere beliefs that determine reality; it's real-world results.

When a society is built on socialist principles and is praised by socialists of the day as being true to their philosophy, that society is socialist whether or not it ends up a democracy.

Note also that Marx considered the initial society following capitalism to be socialist even though it was intended to be a transitional stage between capitalism and perfected socialism. Marx wrote that he expected socialism would eventually achieve what he described as a “higher phase.”¹⁴ The very choice of the term “higher phase” makes it clear that the lower phase is also socialism.

It's disingenuous to say that because twentieth-century socialist regimes failed to produce democratic outcomes or to achieve Marx's “higher phase,” they weren't really trying or should not count as socialist. It's no different than claiming that SpaceX rockets that fail shouldn't count as SpaceX rockets.

Today's socialists make the same promise that earlier socialists made time and again: that the next socialist society will be democratic. What they don't promise is that changes have been made to the socialist



product—changes that would solve the problems that caused the disasters of the socialist past. That’s because no such changes have been made, nor can they be.

As such, there’s no reason to expect anything but another broken promise and another authoritarian result. Hoping socialism will be democratic isn’t going to make it so—especially given socialism’s requirement for compulsion and suppression, the flaws inherent in its design.

BLAME THE DRIVER

Socialism being sold as “democratic” is analogous to a carmaker marketing a model as “safe.” In both cases, it’s not the claims of the salespeople but the performance of the product that determines whether these descriptions are accurate.

When a defective car model crashes, a tactic that dishonest car companies employ is to try to shift blame onto the driver. Today’s socialists take a similar approach. The prime example is the case of Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin.

Marketing “Democracy”

“Democratic” socialism isn’t a new and improved form of socialism. No, it’s a marketing slogan based on the long-held socialist belief that socialism equals democracy.

For well over a century, socialists have not only considered socialism intrinsically democratic but have also argued that only socialism is democratic. To socialist ears, “democratic socialism” has long been equivalent to “socialist socialism”—a meaningless redundancy, except for the usefulness of this label in the socialist sales process.

To learn more, see the RFP paper “The ‘Keto-Friendly’ Political Philosophy.”

Socialists now argue that it’s not socialism but rather Stalin that is responsible for the horrific outcomes in the USSR. Were it not for Stalin—so the argument goes—the socialist revolutions in the USSR and elsewhere would have turned out fine.

There’s even a handy way of putting it: all that bad stuff, they say, was “Stalinism,” not socialism. For example, an article on the Marxist Student Federation website argues that

it is Stalinism which ultimately failed not socialism.¹⁵

And Anthony Arnové claims in the *International Socialist Review* that

Stalinism was actually the negation of socialism.¹⁶

Socialists go so far as to say that Stalinism is responsible not only for what happened in the USSR but also for what happened in other

authoritarian socialist regimes. Daniel Taylor writes in his article “How Stalinism Distorted Marxism” that

Stalinist “revolutions” also took place around the world: more countries adopted state-led economies, aiming for rapid industrialisation by centralising all power in the state bureaucracy.¹⁷

The revolutions in Cuba, China, and elsewhere? In Taylor’s telling, they weren’t socialist revolutions but rather “Stalinist” ones.

Today’s socialists even use the blame-Stalin tactic in connection with their efforts to portray other early leaders of the USSR, such as Vladimir Lenin and Leon Trotsky, as reasonable people who were democratically minded.

For example, in his recent book *Socialism ... Seriously*, Danny Katch spins a fantasy version of the history of the USSR in which Lenin and Trotsky were worried about the Russian Revolution losing its supposed “democratic culture.” Katch contends that socialism in the USSR was on the road to success when Stalin crashed the car:

Stalin maneuvered his way into a dictatorship and launched a historic reign of terror, featuring slave labor camps and mass executions.¹⁸

Katch and others would like us to believe Stalin’s evil represented a dramatic change in trajectory from the course set by Lenin, Trotsky, and others. However, that’s anything but the case. Stalin’s “historic reign of terror, featuring slave labor camps and mass executions” was a terrible but unsurprising result of the authoritarianism that socialism makes inevitable. And it was a logical if horrific outcome of the repressive regime Lenin had already created with Trotsky’s help.

Katch fails to mention that it wasn’t Stalin but rather Lenin who established the USSR’s system of “concentration camps” (as Lenin called them), and also its secret police. Lenin even originated the idea of the secret police coming for their victims in the middle of the

Vladimir Lenin, Ecosocialist?

Even as they work to pin the rap for socialist disasters on Joseph Stalin, today’s socialists attempt to salvage the reputation of socialist dictator Vladimir Lenin. For example, it’s now common for socialists to portray Lenin as a proto-ecosocialist who “strongly embraced ecological values.”

Selling Lenin as green requires hiding his goal of boosting worldwide production volumes to ridiculously unsustainable heights. Moreover, the willingness of today’s socialists to promote this ruthless dictator highlights the authoritarianism they condone.

To learn more, see the RFP paper “Vladimir Lenin, Ecosocialist?”

night.¹⁹ And he without question sanctioned an untold number of executions without trial.²⁰

Given his own dictatorial rule, the notion that Lenin was concerned with democracy is laughable. As these examples of Lenin's thinking make clear, he made no secret of the authoritarianism that socialism requires:

The dictatorship means nothing other than power totally unlimited by any laws, absolutely unrestrained by any regulations and based directly on the use of force.²¹

One out of every ten idlers will be shot on the spot.²²

The rich and their hangers-on, and the rogues, the idlers and the rowdies No mercy for these enemies of the people, the enemies of socialism!²³

And what about Leon Trotsky? His analysis of Marx's thought led him to conclude that

It is beyond question that to step from bourgeois anarchy to Socialist economy without a revolutionary dictatorship, and without compulsory forms of economic organization, is impossible.²⁴

And he similarly wrote that creating socialism demands

the most ruthless form of state which embraces the life of the citizens authoritatively in every direction.²⁵

As we'll see, these are features of socialism writ large, not bugs in Russia's implementation. "The most ruthless form of state" is what Trotsky says socialism requires. "The most ruthless form of state" is what Lenin and Trotsky created. But when Lenin died, Stalin beat out Trotsky in the bid to be Lenin's successor and used "the most ruthless form of state" not only against the general population but even against Trotsky and his followers (who, in classic socialist fashion, were charged with being fascist sympathizers²⁶).

It's no surprise that once socialism's "most ruthless form of state" exists, it cannot be controlled. It's no surprise that a "historic reign of terror" can easily result.

SOCIALISM'S IRREPARABLE DESIGN DEFECTS

When a SpaceX rocket explodes, the company's engineers don't pretend that it wasn't theirs. They try to determine what went wrong and fix the problems. When a car's design results in crashes, ethical manufacturers don't blame the driver; they issue a recall and attempt to correct the issue. And if problems persist? Again, the response is to find the flaws and fix them.

But this has not been the socialist strategy. And there's a reason that's the case.

Why do socialists argue that "socialism has never been tried" and try to pin the blame on Stalin? Why not explain how socialism has been redesigned to solve the problems of the past? The answer is found in the fact that there is no fixing the faulty aspects of socialism. There's no way to replace the bad parts or fix the bugs. The problems are baked in to its very structure.

There are three significant flaws in socialism's design, and they can't be eliminated. They are non-optional features. According to socialist philosophy, they are unequivocally required to create a socialist society. And they guarantee that any future socialist experiment will be an authoritarian accident waiting to happen, no different than the socialist disasters of the past.

DEFECT 1: A FOUNDATION ON COMPULSORY DUTY

From its beginnings as a philosophy, socialism has demanded that our time and talents be given to society, putting them under social control.²⁷ This foundational duty is reflected in the famous socialist axiom "from each according to their ability,"

French socialist Louis Blanc developed the specific phrasing of this expression more than 170 years ago. Marx embraced it, and it remains socialism's central requirement today.

Blanc explains its meaning (the italics and capitalization are his):

The more one *can*, the more one *must*. ... Hence the axiom: from each according to his ability. That is the DUTY.²⁸

Socialist duty turns our time into what socialism treats as society's time. It gives those running socialist societies the power to use our lives for their purposes. It gives them the right to judge us and punish us if we don't perform our duties to their satisfaction. As prior socialist societies have repeatedly demonstrated, it's a despot's dream.

In our present liberal society, our time and talents are our personal property to use as we wish. We're not born owing them to King or Queen, to fascists calling themselves "the community," or to socialists calling themselves "society." Because liberalism treats our time and talents as our private property, it's our right to use them in essentially any way we wish, including ways others consider wasteful and wrong.

Socialism's duty of "from each according to their ability" flips the script. How we use our time and talents must now be approved by those running society, because socialist duty turns time and talents into society's property to control. As Fidel Castro explains:

Socialism cannot exist unless every citizen is given optimum employment, unless every citizen is used in an optimum, rational way.²⁹

Consider how socialist duty and the goal of making sure every citizen "is used" transforms reactions to slacking in socialist society. In our liberal society, it's our right to be slackers if we wish. Others may disapprove, but as our time is our individual property, it's ours to use as we see fit. In contrast, under socialism, which treats our time as society's time, slackers are branded "thieves" and "parasites" and "dealt with as such."³⁰ Socialist greats not only call for idlers to be "shot on the spot" as we've seen Vladimir Lenin do above, but they also argue, as Fidel Castro does, that "laziness must become a crime."³¹

The implications of socialist duty transforming our time into society's time even extend to the efficiency of labor. For example, in our liberal society, it's our right to open a craft workshop even though craftwork involves extremely inefficient production methods. In contrast, under socialism, the inefficiency of small-scale production like craftwork is seen as a "waste"³² of society's time. This is what leads socialists to express views like those of celebrated socialist thinker Nikola Bukharin (praised by today's socialists as a proto-ecosocialist³³):

The Problem of "Interminable Meetings"

That socialism is destined to be authoritarian is reinforced by how socialists say a democratic socialist society would function. Decisions about suppressing jobs, products, businesses, and so on would be the result of society-wide debates. These sessions would determine the fate of millions of jobs, access to countless thousands of products, and so on.

Democratic Socialists of American founder Michael Harrington admits this plan threatens to "create a society with interminable meetings." Such a system would never survive month after month, year after year. It would soon collapse, returning socialism to its authoritarian norm.

To learn more, see the RFP paper "Four Hours Every Workday."

All small and futile enterprises must die out. All work must be concentrated in the largest possible factories, works, farms.³⁴

Today's socialism remains founded on the same dangerous duty of "from each according to their ability."³⁵ This is the duty that was required of citizens in Stalin's USSR, Mao's People's Republic of China, Castro's Cuba, and on down the line. Socialism could not function if this duty to give our time and talents to society didn't override our liberal right to use our lives as we choose.

Come socialism, who will decide if you're properly performing its duty of "from each according to their ability" or if you're a "social parasite" in need of punishment?

One thing is certain: It won't be you.

DEFECT 2: A SOCIETY OF SUPPRESSION

Socialists say transforming our present society into a socialist one necessitates "drastic measures"³⁶ and the "suppression,"³⁷ "elimination,"³⁸ "abolition,"³⁹ "wiping out,"⁴⁰ and so on, of numerous aspects of our current liberal society.

The socialist plan calls for the suppression of:

- "idlers" and other "social parasites,"⁴¹
- "socially useless" work,⁴²
- "socially useless" products,⁴³
- our "private labor" rights,⁴⁴
- private property rights and private enterprise,⁴⁵
- and small, independent producers like craft workshops.⁴⁶

Even "democratic socialists" and "ecosocialists" are in favor of such suppression (including, as we'll shortly see, the most important democratic socialist and ecosocialist of all time). They call for socialism to eliminate these aspects of liberal society.

Again, socialist philosophy states that these forms of suppression are essential to creating socialism. Take, for example, the plan to make "socially useless" work illegal. According to socialist theory, hundreds of kinds of work in our present society are "useless," and the millions who perform these "unnecessary" tasks must be forced to

perform “useful” work instead. This is said to be key to creating a society based on the axiom “to each according to their need.”⁴⁷ It’s also cited as the path to fulfilling socialism’s claim that it would dramatically reduce work hours.⁴⁸

The suppression of allegedly “useless” work isn’t just socialist theory; this is exactly what’s happened in earlier socialist societies. (Despite claims that “socialism has never been tried,” these societies really did what socialist theory called for.) For example, here Fidel Castro celebrates the “rationalization”—that is, the elimination by state power—of craft workshops in Cuba:

Artisan-type enterprises are disappearing as a result of the rationalization—as a matter of fact, when those firms were rationalized, 40,000 workers were made available for other industries. ... Note the 40,000 workers freed for those industries!⁴⁹

Socialism’s goals make it biased toward greater suppression rather than less. Each additional type of work that’s made illegal means more socialist citizens will be “freed” to perform approved jobs. Each additional product that’s made illegal means one less thing that socialism must produce to deliver “to each according to their need.”

A socialist government must have vast powers to carry out its mission of suppression.

The government of a socialist society must take up the vast powers required to carry out this mission of suppression. It must have the wherewithal to crush resistance to its draconian policies. Thus, it’s no surprise that Vladimir Lenin—whom today’s socialists still praise⁵⁰—called for a society based on “unlimited power and the use of force, not of law.”

The mass suppression that socialism entails is authoritarian in its own right. But the danger is far greater than that. Once a government founded on suppression is in place, there’s no telling how its powers will end up being used, and there’s little, if anything, to keep authoritarianism from becoming totalitarianism—and even mass murder.

DEFECT 3: “MARX LIVES!”

Socialism is, in reality, Marxism. Contrary to what the terms “democratic socialism” and “ecosocialism” would lead one to believe, these aren’t new versions of the socialist product. No, they remain Marx’s communism.

This is vividly illustrated by the fact that today’s socialists say Karl Marx should be considered a literal “democratic socialist” and a literal “ecosocialist.”

The Fix That Isn't Coming

Karl Marx recognized the threat of authoritarianism baked in to socialist philosophy. But he mistakenly expected this risk to be neutered. Socialism, he said, would radically outproduce capitalism, creating a world of limitless abundance based on what he termed the “constant over-production” of needed goods.

Marx's anticipated fix to socialism's design flaws will never come. Not only has socialism failed to boost production as predicted, but a world in which tens of thousands of items are constantly overproduced is absurdly unsustainable.

To learn more, see the RFP paper “The Secret Sauce of Socialism.”

Who says Marx should be considered a “democratic socialist? None other than the founder of the Democratic Socialists of America, Michael Harrington.⁵¹ (This is despite the central role Marx's thinking has played in authoritarian socialist nations, and it's despite the fact Marx called human rights “nonsense.”⁵²)

And who says Marx should be considered an “ecosocialist”? Celebrated ecosocialist Kohei Saito for one.⁵³ (This is despite Marx's desire for socialism to result in a world of “constant over-production.”⁵⁴)

Given the overwhelming importance of his thinking to socialist philosophy, there can be no more important democratic socialist or ecosocialist than Marx. He denies any possibility of mixing liberalism and socialism.⁵⁵ He calls not only for the eradication of every business, large and small⁵⁶ but also for the elimination of all self-employment,⁵⁷ and even all buying and selling.⁵⁸ As noted socialist thinker Agnes Heller puts it, his philosophy seeks to abolish all independent aspects of society, instead creating one in which “the whole of social production functions as a single factory.”⁵⁹

Despite these and numerous other anti-liberal aspects of Marx's philosophy, there's no question that for today's socialists, “Marx lives!” This two-word sentence concludes Kohei Saito's recent *Karl Marx's Ecosocialism* (winner of the 2018 Deutscher Prize, a socialist book award). Saito is right: Marx's thinking remains the socialist gospel. Each year, socialists publish a torrent of new works arguing that Marx's ideas should be the basis of a radically altered society.

Today's socialists attempt to hide the real Marx—for example, his plan for child labor to be a key part of “school” in socialist society,⁶⁰ and the reality that his socialism “requires the demise of craft labor.”⁶¹ But as one comes to understand Marx's thinking, it's easy to see why things always spin out of control in societies built on his philosophy.

The fact that socialism is really Marxism reinforces the risks posed by socialism's other irreparable defects. There's no way to deliver on the goals Marx established for socialism without basing society on a compulsory duty that gives those running socialist society dangerous control over our lives. There's no way to create the society

Marx demands without a government tasked with and empowered to undertake the wholesale suppression of our rights and numerous other important aspects of our present liberal society.

It's unfortunate but true: "Marx lives!"

ANY FUTURE SOCIALIST EXPERIMENT WILL ALSO END UP A "MYTH"

If the design flaws in the socialist product could be repaired, they would have been long ago. Instead of arguing that "socialism has never been tried," today's socialists would be explaining how they had solved the problems that caused prior socialist nightmares.

But socialism's requirement for compulsion and suppression are defects that cannot be corrected. And this means that future socialist societies will inevitably result in authoritarianism, just like those of the past.

When the next socialist experiment launches, it will repeat the cycle we've seen so many times before. Socialists will begin by celebrating it as democratic socialism come to life. But soon they'll be claiming that it was never socialism at all.

NOTES

1. To learn more, see the RFP paper “Democratic Socialism? Déjà Vu All Over Again.”
2. Eugene Debs, “The Canton, Ohio, Speech [June 16, 1918],” in *Eugene V. Debs Speaks*, ed. Jean Y. Tussey (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970), 271.
3. “1917–2017 Russia Never Was Socialist,” *Socialist Standard* 116, no. 1349 (January 2017): 3.
4. Adam Buick, “Non-Market Socialism,” in *Life without Money: Building Fair and Sustainable Economies*, ed. Anitra Nelson and Frans Timmerman (London: Pluto, 2011), 139.
5. “Hillel Ticktin: I have not met any Marxist in the Soviet Union,” interview by Volodymyr Artukh and Denys Gorbach, *Commons*, February 2, 2022, <https://commons.com.ua/en/intervyu-z-gillelem-tiktinom/>.
6. The International Socialist Organization, “Where We Stand,” accessed October 27, 2023, <https://socialistworker.org/where-we-stand>.
7. “Castro: Latin American Nationalist,” *Socialist Standard* 116, no. 1349 (January 2017): 10.
8. “Socialism Has Never Been Tried,” trans. M. D., *Socialist Standard* 95, no. 1139 (July 1999): <https://www.worldsocialism.org/spgb/socialist-standard/1999/1990s/no-1139-july-1999/socialism-has-never-been-tried/>.
9. Perry Sanders and Dianna Sitar, “Socialism Hasn’t Failed; It Hasn’t Been Tried—Yet!” *New Unionist* (December 1993): <http://www.deleonism.org/text/nu931201.htm>.
10. Paresh Chattopadhyay, “The Myth of Twentieth-Century Socialism and the Continuing Relevance of Karl Marx,” *Socialism and Democracy* 24, no. 3 (November 2010): 23–45.
11. Among the twentieth-century nations proclaiming themselves as socialist were the following: the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the People’s Republic of China, the Republic of Cuba, the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, the Socialist Republic of Romania, the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Democratic Kampuchea, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, the German Democratic Republic, the People’s Socialist Republic of Albania, the Polish People’s Republic, the Hungarian People’s Republic, the People’s Republic of Bulgaria, the People’s Republic of the Congo, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic.
12. Buick, “Non-Market Socialism,” 140.
13. Nathan J. Robinson, *Why You Should Be a Socialist* (New York: St. Martin’s, 2019), 111.
14. Marx wrote that socialist society was to have two phases: a first following capitalism and then a second “higher phase.” Both phases were socialist. The higher phase was simply the perfected version of socialism that would (in theory) come into existence when socialism had boosted production volumes to the astounding levels needed to distribute all goods for free worldwide, thereby permitting socialism to “inscribe on its banners: from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs!” Karl Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, in *Marx/Engels Collected Works* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1950), 2:22–23.
15. Marxist Student Federation, “Hasn’t Socialism Been Tried and Failed?” September 12, 2018, <https://marxiststudent.com/hasnt-socialism-been-tried-and-failed/>.

NOTES

16. Anthony Arnove, “The Fall of Stalinism: Ten Years On,” *International Socialist Review* 10 (Winter 2000): https://isreview.org/issues/10/fall_of_stalinism/.

17. Daniel Taylor, “How Stalinism Distorted Marxism,” *Red Flag*, September 5, 2019, <https://redflag.org.au/node/6885>.

18. Danny Katch, *Socialism ... Seriously: A Brief Guide to Human Liberation* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2015), 121.

19. Dmitri Volkogonov, *Lenin: A New Biography*, trans. Harold Shukman (New York: The Free Press, 1994), 238–39.

20. For example, Lenin called explicitly for Russian religious leaders to be “shot on the spot.” Over fourteen thousand were slain. Volkogonov, *Lenin*, 379; Victor Sebestyen, *Lenin the Dictator* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2017), 475.

21. Vladimir Lenin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* [Full collected writings] (1958), 41:236, quoted in Volkogonov, *Lenin*, 237.

22. “How to Organize Competition,” in *Lenin: Collected Works*, ed. George Hanna, trans. Yuri Sdobnikov and George Hanna (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1964), 26:414.

23. Lenin, “How to Organize Competition,” 414.

24. Leon Trotsky, *Dictatorship vs. Democracy: A Reply to Karl Kautsky* (New York: Workers Party of America, 1922), 139.

25. Trotsky, *Dictatorship vs. Democracy*, 169.

26. For example, American socialist Alex Bittelman authored *Trotsky the Traitor* (New York: Workers Library Publishers, 1937). It opens: “Lenin called Trotsky Judas—and cautioned the people repeatedly to beware of him. Today Trotsky and his agents stand exposed before the whole world. ... It is incredible, some people say, that Trotsky and his agents should have gone so far. Conspiring with Hitler and Japan to dismember the Soviet Union, to destroy its socialist system” (1). Bittelman also writes: “Trotskyism, like its ally, fascism, is a menace to the world. It is a menace to its peace, its progress, its democracy” (30).

27. The compulsory duty to give one’s time and talents to society has underpinned socialist thinking from its founding. For example, one of the earliest socialist philosophical works is *The Code of Nature*, which was published anonymously but is generally credited to Étienne-Gabriel Morelly. In a section subtitled “Sacred and Fundamental Laws that would tear out the roots of vice and of all the evils of a society,” Morelly proposes the requirement that “Every citizen will make his contribution to the activities of the community according to his capacity, his talent and his age; it is on this basis that his duties will be determined.” Selections from *Code of Nature*, in *Socialist Thought: A Documentary History*, ed. Albert Fried and Robert Sanders (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 20.

28. Louis Blanc, *La Historie de la Révolution de 1848* (Paris: C. Marpon, 1880), 1:148.

29. Fidel Castro, “Castro Speaks to Education Conference [December 24, 1991],” Castro Speech Database, <http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/castro/db/1991/19911224.html>. Emphasis added.

30. “Any person who neglects or refuses to pay this debt [to socialist society] by contributing, according to his ability, to satisfying the needs of the present or future generations is held to be a thief, and will be dealt with as such.” Sidney Webb and Beatrice Webb, *Soviet Communism: A New Civilisation*, 3rd ed. (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1942), 911.

31. Fidel Castro, “CDR Rally [September 29, 1970],” Castro Speech Database, <http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/castro/db/1970/19700929-1.html>

NOTES

32. American socialist leader Daniel De Leon explains that, from the perspective of socialism, the methods today's craftspeople employ amounts to "labor-power wasted" and are "socially unnecessary." He states: "The excess of labor-power, expended upon the yard of cloth turned out by the old appliances, is labor-power wasted. It is labor power wasted because it was socially unnecessary. It was socially unnecessary because society had evolved the superior appliances and methods." Daniel De Leon, *Fifteen Questions about Socialism* (New York: Socialist Labor Party, 1914), 39–40.

33. In his recent book, *The Return of Nature: Socialism and Ecology* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2020), noted ecosocialist John Bellamy Foster cites Bukharin dozens of times, portraying him as a proto-ecosocialist.

34. Nikolai Bukharin, quoted in Morris Hillquit, *From Marx to Lenin* (New York: The Hanford Press, 1921), 39.

35. The axiom "from each according to their ability" remains the socialist standard, appearing time and again today, as three examples illustrate.

First, the Democratic Socialists of America's 2017 annual convention used signage with famous socialist sayings, including "from each according to their ability, to each according to their needs." David Weigel, "The Socialist Movement Is Turning Younger and Turning into a Left-Wing Force," *Chicago Tribune*, August 6, 2017, <https://www.chicagotribune.com/nation-world/ct-socialist-movement-bernie-sanders-20170806-story.html>.

Second, the Socialist Students Society of Cardiff University proclaims in its organizational overview: "As socialists we believe that a different kind of society is possible in which the principle of 'from each according to their ability, to each according to their need' (Karl Marx) is realized." "Socialist Students Society," Cardiff University Students Union, accessed February 15, 2021, <https://www.cardiffstudents.com/activities/society/socialiststudents/>.

Third, Binay Sakar, in a 2019 article, cites "from each according to their ability, to each according to their needs" as the goal of democratic socialism. Binay Sakar, "Road-Map to Socialism—Democracy Is the Road to Socialism," *Countercurrents.org*, July 6, 2019, <https://countercurrents.org/2019/07/road-map-to-socialism-democracy-is-the-road-to-socialism/>.

36. "[Creating socialism requires] drastic measures to eliminate the parasites." Ernesto "Che" Guevara, "Contra El Burocratismo [February 1963]," in *Obra revolucionaria* (Mexico City: Ediciones ERA, 1971), 548

37. "Now these useless workers, socialism will suppress them; it will make them useful. Instead of being parasites they will become producers." Lucien Deslinières, *Entretiens Socialistes* (Paris: Choisy Le Roi, 1901), 35–36. Author's translation.

"This regime [socialism] will spare human labor, the waste of which is immoral. This savings will be achieved by several methods, including the following three: Competition will be suppressed. ... Idleness will be suppressed. ... Production will be centralized as much as possible." Pierre Deloire [Charles Peguy], "De La Cite Socialiste," *Le Revue Socialiste* 25, no. 1 (1897): 187–88.

"By the centralization of services, we will suppress the small workshops where three or four workers labor strenuously without producing a hundredth of what they could produce in a large social factory." Paul Argpriadès, *Almanach de la question sociale* (Paris: L'administration de la question sociale, 1891), 37

38. "The altered conditions of social life [in socialist society] will also thoroughly revolutionize our literature. The theological literature ... will be *eliminated*, together with the judicial literature. For the one there will be no more interest, and for the other no need. The products that have reference to the struggles over institutions of the state, will also be *eliminated*, because these institutions will no longer exist. They will assume the character of historical studies. The numerous literary products of a highly superficial nature, which are just a proof of bad taste and sometimes are made possible only by a sacrifice of the author's pride, will be *dropped*. Even from the present point of view, we may say that four-fifths of all literary products might disappear from the market without a loss to one single interest of civilization, so great is the mass of superficial or harmful products and

NOTES

obvious trash on the field of literature.” August Bebel, *Woman and Socialism*, trans. Meta L. Stern, (New York: Socialist Literature Company, 1910), 453.

The idea of suppressing “superficial or harmful and obvious trash” literature is by no means unique to Bebel. It was a featured aspect of noted socialist Etienne Cabet’s novel describing a perfected socialist society, *Voyage to Icarie*. Lenin purged half of the books in Russian public libraries (see the RFP paper “Vladimir Lenin, Ecosocialist?”)

39. “The first step to be taken is to abolish a class of men privileged to shirk their duties as men.” William Morris, *Useful Work versus Useless Toil* (London: The Socialist League, 1886), 27.

“[Socialism] must be based on the abolition of ‘private labor.’” Kohei Saito, *Karl Marx’s Ecosocialism: Capitalism, Nature, and the Unfinished Critique of Political Economy* (New York: Monthly Review, 2017), conclusion. Kindle.

40. Karl Kautsky was nicknamed “the Pope of Marxism” for being the leading interpreter of Marx’s thought after Marx and Engels died. “The Pope” channels the socialist messiah Marx when he states that “one of the strong points” of socialism is that it creates the possibility of “wiping out in the quickest possible manner [by using government force] the ruins of the outgrown means and methods of production.” Karl Kautsky, *The Social Revolution*, trans. A. M. Simons and May Woods Simons (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 1902), 168.

41. To learn the details about socialism’s fascist-like fixation with alleged “parasites” and their suppression, see the RFP paper “The Socialist Obsession.” For a specific look at what socialism says about suppressing those deemed slackers, see the RFP paper “Why Socialism Says Slacking Is ‘Theft.’”

42. Socialism has long called for the suppression of allegedly “socially useless” work. For example, William Morris calls for “all useless work being abolished” (William Morris, “Art and Labour,” in *The Unpublished Lectures of William Morris*, ed. Eugene D. Lemire [Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1969], 115). Also true to socialist thought, Morris wrote that when socialism began, “useless occupations would be got rid of speedily” (William Morris, “An Unpublished Lecture of William Morris,” ed. Paul Meier, *International Review of Social History* 16, no. 2 [1971]: 23.)

Making an untold number of jobs illegal and forcing those who currently hold these jobs to perform work approved as “useful” remains a central tenet of socialism today. For example, Fred Magdoff asserts that “as great as *half of the labor force*” perform socially useless tasks and that a socialist society would make these workers perform tasks that have the blessings of socialists instead. Fred Magdoff, “An Ecologically Sound and Just Economy,” *Monthly Review* 6, no. 4 (September 2014): <https://monthlyreview.org/2014/09/01/an-ecologically-sound-and-socially-just-economy/>. Emphasis added.

43. Just as socialist theory calls for the suppression of allegedly useless work, so too it calls for the suppression of all “socially useless” products. Unsurprisingly, this concept is found in the thinking of Karl Marx. Marx writes that in socialist society “the time of production devoted to different articles will be determined by the degree of their social utility” (Karl Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy* [Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1956], 63). In other words, if a product is deemed to not be socially useful, it will be permitted zero production time. William Morris similarly explains that in socialist society “useless goods” will be suppressed: “Manufacture of useless goods, whether harmful luxuries for the rich or disgraceful makeshifts for the poor, having come to an end...” (William Morris, *A Factory as It Might Be*, in *Justice* [April-May 1884], reproduced in *Informal Education Archives*, <https://infed.org/mobi/william-morris-a-factory-as-it-might-be/>).

The plan of present-day socialists remains the same. For example, Michael Löwy writes, “Many products in contemporary society are socially useless” (Michael Löwy, “Ecosocialism: A Vital Synthesis,” *Climate and Capitalism*, December 16, 2020, <https://climateandcapitalism.com/2020/12/16/ecosocialism-a-vital-synthesis/>). Löwy says that an ecosocialist society would determine which needs are “authentic” ones. Socialist society would only produce goods and services required to fulfill needs approved as authentic. The implication is that there are other needs that socialism considers inauthentic. Löwy labels these “artificial or counterproductive

NOTES

needs.” Production of these many products that socialists deem “socially useless” because they fill “artificial or counterproductive needs” would become illegal.

44. Marx called for our “private labor” rights to be eliminated and for socialist society to be based on “social labor,” which he also referred to as “directly social labor.” Social labor is our labor under society’s direct control instead of under our individual control. Marx explains that in socialist society, “the labour of the individual is posited from the outset as social labor” (Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Martin Nicolaus [London: Penguin Books, 1973], 172). In a socialist society, your work would be treated as society’s property “from the outset.” You would never own it.

Today’s socialists continue to call for the suppression of our private labor rights. For example, in 2017, Kohei Saito wrote that socialism “must be based on the abolition of ‘private labor.’” Saito, *Karl Marx’s Ecosocialism*, conclusion.

To learn more about socialism’s plan to eliminate our private labor rights, see the RFP paper, “A ‘Defect’ of Liberalism.”

45. The elimination of all private enterprise and our private property rights that make private enterprise possible has been a socialist goal from the philosophy’s earliest days. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels made this a central concept of their philosophy.

For example, Engels describes society “seizing” control of all private enterprise, thereby yielding a situation in which there is no production of commodities—that is, no goods that would be bought and sold: “With the seizing of the means of production by society, production of commodities is done away with Anarchy in social production is replaced by systematic, definite organization.” Friedrich Engels, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, trans. Edward Averling (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1892), 81.

The plan for the elimination of private enterprise remains a staple aspect of socialism today, including as part of today’s so-called “ecosocialism.” For example, Chris Williams writes that socialism means that private property “is abolished” (Chris Williams, *Ecology and Socialism* [Chicago: Haymarket, 2010], 216). A society without private property is, by definition, a society without private enterprise. Williams also describes socialist society as based on “production for use” and not “production for profit” (226). This is a concept that has been at the heart of socialism for 150 years, and it reflects the socialist plan to eliminate private enterprise, which requires profit to function.

Michael Löwy similarly writes that ecosocialism means “the collective appropriation of the means of production.” This phrase has been a stock way for socialists to describe the elimination of private enterprise for well over a century. Michael Löwy, “The Ethics of Ecosocialism,” *The New Socialist* 62 [Fall 2007]: 8.

46. In the previous section, we’ve noted that celebrated socialist Nikolai Bukharin wrote, “All small and futile enterprises must die out.” This is by no means a position unique to Bukharin but rather reflects socialism’s overall bias against small-scale production. Another example of this thinking is found in the writing of noted socialist Laurence Gronlund, who, like Bukharin, is sold as a proto-ecosocialist today (see the RFP paper “Vladimir Lenin, Ecosocialist?”). Gronlund writes: “Every large factory which arises on the ruin of the shops of the small artisans we consider an advance in civilization.” Laurence Gronlund, *The Cooperative Commonwealth: An Exposition of Modern Socialism* (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1884), 109.

47. The socialist belief that their system could dramatically boost production, yielding a world in which all goods could be distributed for free, resulted in large part from their belief that a substantial percentage of work in capitalist society was “useless” work that could be made illegal. Those who had worked allegedly useless jobs would be forced to perform work approved as useful, thereby dramatically increasing production of needed goods. One example of this thinking comes from noted socialist Laurence Gronlund: “By putting all our parasites and superfluous workers where they can work productively ... the stock of the good things of this life will thereby be very much enlarged, perhaps doubled.” Gronlund, *Cooperative Commonwealth*, 115.

48. A central socialist claim (one that has never panned out in the real world) is that socialism would result in a dramatic reduction of the workday. This was to be a byproduct of socialism suppressing “useless” work and

NOTES

forcing all to perform work approved by those running society. This claim is misleading at best, since socialism has concrete plans for how any saved work hours would be used: mandatory group meetings. To learn more, see the RFP paper “Four Hours Every Workday.”

Here are two examples of celebrated socialist William Morris describing how, by getting rid of allegedly wasted work, socialism would result in reduced work hours:

“We are going to get rid of all non-workers, and busy-idle people; so that the working time of each member of our factory will be very short.” William Morris, “Work in a Factory as It Might Be II,” in *Political Writings: Contributions to Justice and Commonweal 1883–1890*, ed. Nicolas Salmon (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1994), 40.

“Under conditions where all produced and no work was wasted, not only would everyone work with the certain hope of gaining a due share of wealth by his work, but also he could not miss his due share of rest.” William Morris, “Useful Work versus Useless Toil,” in *Signs of Change: Seven Lectures Delivered on Various Occasions* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1896), 154.

49. Fidel Castro, “Castro Addresses PURS Meeting [February 23, 1963],” Castro Speech Database, <http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/castro/db/1963/19630223.html>.

50. Today’s socialists praise Vladimir Lenin, despite his being the ruthless dictator who founded the USSR’s secret police and concentration camps. For example, celebrated ecosocialist James Bellamy Foster applauds Lenin in numerous books and articles, writing (disingenuously) that Lenin “strongly embraced ecological values,” among other such claims. (John Bellamy Foster, “Late Soviet Ecology,” *Monthly Review* 67, no. 2 [2015]: <https://monthlyreview.org/2015/06/01/late-soviet-ecology-and-the-planetary-crisis/>.) To understand how selling Lenin reveals the authoritarianism that today’s socialists condone, see the RFP paper “Vladimir Lenin, Ecosocialist?”

51. Harrington even dedicated his book *The Twilight of Capitalism* to “democratic socialist—Karl Marx.” (Michael Harrington, *The Twilight of Capitalism* [New York: Simon and Schuster, 1976], v.) For additional examples of Harrington citing both Marx and Engels as “democratic socialists,” see the RFP paper “Karl Marx: ‘Democratic Socialist.’”

52. Marx repeatedly denigrated our liberal rights—for example, calling them “rubbish” and “nonsense” (Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, 23). See the RFP paper “Our ‘So-Called’ Rights.”

53. Kohei Saito, “Karl Marx’s Idea of Ecosocialism in the 21st First Century,” in Martin Empson, ed., *System Change Not Climate Change: A Revolutionary Response to Environmental Crisis* (London: Bookmark Publications, 2019), 68.

54. Marx expected socialism to radically outproduce capitalism, resulting in a world of such overflowing abundance that all needed goods could be taken for free forever by the world’s population. As this world of superabundance would require a constant oversupply of needed goods, Marx wrote of socialism meaning a society of “constant over-production.” (Karl Marx, *Capital*, trans. Ben Fowkes and David Fernbach, 3 vols. [London: Penguin Classics, 1978–1981], 2:256–57.) This is an absurdly unsustainable concept, one that is as far from ecologically sound as it’s possible to imagine. See the RFP paper “The Secret Sauce of Socialism.”

55. Marx’s socialism is based on the eradication not simply of capitalism but of liberalism, the political system founded on individual rights, of which capitalism is the economic expression.

Marx attacked individual rights—the very foundation of liberalism—as “rubbish,” “so-called rights,” and the like. (See the RFP paper “Our ‘So-Called’ Rights.”)

Marx supported socialism’s foundation on the compulsory duty of “from each according to their ability.” The very starting point of liberalism is the rejection of this kind of onerous duty, which turns our time and talents into something others have the power to control. (See the RFP paper “The Ripple Effects of Socialist Duty.”)

Marx called for the elimination of not only liberal property rights but also our individual right to control the use of our time, which he called our “private labor” rights. (See in the RFP paper “A ‘Defect’ Of Liberalism.”)

56. Marx called for the elimination of all private enterprise and for society to have total control of “the means of production.” Here, noted Marxist thinkers Nikolai Bukharin and Yevgeni Preobraschensky describe Marx’s view of socialism (which Marx interchangeably called “communism”; see the RFP paper “Socialism? Communism? What’s the Difference?”): “The basis of the Communist form of society *is common ownership of the means of production and distribution of wealth*—that is, the ownership and control by society of machinery, locomotives, steamships, factories, warehouses, granaries, mines, telegraphs and telephones, land, etc. Neither one capitalist, nor a league of capitalists, will have the right to dispose of the means of life. That right will belong to society as a whole—that is to say, not merely to *one class*, but to *all those* who make up society. ... There will be no competition amongst captains of industry, because all factories, mines, and other means of production will be part of a great system of people’s workshops which will comprise the whole of society.” Nikolai Bukharin and Yevgeni Preobraschensky, *A. B. C. of Communism*, trans. Patrick Lavin (Detroit: Marxian Educational Society, 1921), 56.

57. See n. 44.

58. By Marx’s definition, a socialist society is one that has eliminated the buying and selling of goods, and money as well. Bukharin and Preobraschensky describe this aspect of Marx’s vision of socialism: “The Communist mode of production, therefore, is not production for the market, but for the needs of the community. Each individual does not produce for himself, however, but the whole gigantic association for all. Consequently, there are no *commodities*, but simply *goods*. These goods are not exchanged against one another; they are neither bought nor sold. They are simply taken to the communal stores, and there given to whomsoever requires them. Under this system money is not necessary.” Bukharin and Preobraschensky, *A. B. C. of Communism*, 57–58.

59. Agnes Heller, *The Theory of Needs in Marx* (London: Allison & Busby, 1974), 108.

60. Marx wrote repeatedly about his desire for children to perform “productive labor” for socialist society as a key part of their school day, nicknaming this idea “the education of the future.” Today’s socialists hide Marx’s child labor as “education” plans. For example, even a socialist-authored book with the very title *Marx and Education* mentions not one word about this favorite idea of Marx’s. See the RFP paper “Karl Marx’s ‘Education of the Future.’”

61. It’s noted Marxist thinker G. A. Cohen who concludes that Marx’s socialism “requires the demise of craft labor.” Cohen lists two aspects of Marx’s thinking that indicate Marx “must banish” craft from socialist society. (G. A. Cohen, “Marx’s Dialectic of Labor,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 3, no. 3 [Spring 1974]: 255–56.) For the full details regarding socialism’s rejection of craftwork, see the RFP paper “Why Socialism Says Craftwork Is ‘Idiocy.’”