

KARL MARX

"Democratic Socialist"



————— “ —————
Champion of human freedom and democratic socialist, Karl Marx.

—MICHAEL HARRINGTON, FOUNDER OF THE DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISTS OF AMERICA

————— ” —————



redflagspress.org

KARL MARX

"Democratic Socialist"

When democratic socialists say Karl Marx is one of their own, they demonstrate that democratic socialism is really plain old socialism.

Karl Marx is socialism's most revered figure. He's socialist superstar number one.

Marx's goals and beliefs have defined socialism for the past 150 years. His thinking is tightly linked with authoritarian socialism of the kind found in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR).

Here's something else about Karl Marx—something you may not have known:

He's a democratic socialist.

Says who? Says Michael Harrington, the founder of the present-day Democratic Socialists of America (DSA). Harrington knew well what it means to be a democratic socialist and what beliefs would get you booted from the club.

Harrington proclaimed Marx a democratic socialist multiple times. He even dedicated his book *The Twilight of Capitalism* not to a family member or friend but to

champion of human freedom and democratic socialist, Karl Marx.¹

Harrington likewise bestowed the democratic socialist seal of approval on Friedrich Engels, Marx's colleague and socialist superstar number two.²

There are three important things to know about Marx and Engels's status as democratic socialists.

First, the fact that these two most important of all socialist thinkers are considered democratic socialists makes it clear that democratic socialism is *not* a new version of socialism. It shows that democratic socialism is, for all intents and purposes, the same version socialists have sold for generations. It's Marxism.

Second, Marx and Engels being counted as democratic socialists makes it easy to demonstrate that democratic socialism is based on the rejection of the most fundamental rights of liberal society.

Third, these two being considered democratic socialists illustrates that one can be a democratic socialist despite calling for outright authoritarianism. One is welcome to be a democratic socialist even while seeking to create a society intent on eradicating alleged “social parasites,” a society that would eliminate our right to individually control our work lives, and a society that would abolish our right to have our own small businesses.

The second and third implications reinforce the first—the reality that “democratic socialism” is not a new version of socialism; it’s marketing spin. Why is democratic socialism based on the rejection of key liberal rights, just like plain old socialism is? Why are democratic socialists permitted to advocate such authoritarian goals as the suppression of alleged “parasites,” just like plain old socialists? Because democratic socialism *is* plain old socialism.

“MARX AND ENGELS TURN TO ... DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISM”

Before exploring the implications of Marx and Engels being considered democratic socialists, let’s take a closer look at what DSA founder Harrington has to say.

We’ve already seen that Harrington dedicated his *The Twilight of Capitalism* to “democratic socialist, Karl Marx.” He names Marx a democratic socialist on at least two other occasions.

In *Socialism: Past and Future*, Harrington argues that eventually

Marx and Engels turn to what can only be described as democratic socialism.³

And in his succinctly titled *Socialism*, Harrington describes

the emergence of Marx the social democrat.⁴

Was it necessary for Harrington to call Marx a democratic socialist? Absolutely not. Had he believed Marx’s thinking was at odds with democratic socialist ideals, Harrington would never have called Marx a democratic socialist once, much less repeatedly.

Moreover, Harrington had every opportunity to demonstrate nuance. He didn’t have to give Marx carte blanche as a democratic socialist. Had he considered any of Marx’s specific goals and beliefs to be inconsistent with those of democratic socialism,

he could have said so: “Except for his desire to eliminate your right to own a small business, Marx was one heck of a democratic socialist.” But Harrington does not write about such an exception.

Nor does he list any of Marx and Engels’s other anti-liberal goals or beliefs as exclusions when knighting them democratic socialists. Instead of distancing democratic socialism from Marx and Engels, Harrington hugs them close.

What in particular makes Marx and Engels democratic socialists? We can tell from Harrington’s words that he believes something about their thinking changes over time. He describes

the *emergence* of Marx the social democrat.

Harrington also says

Marx and Engels *turn to* what can only be described as democratic socialism.

To emerge implies there is something one is emerging from. To turn to something means there’s something one is turning away from.

What change in the thinking of Marx and Engels permits them to be democratic socialists? Unfortunately, it’s not that they begin to advocate the kind of society that an everyday person would call “democratic.”

Do they drop their insistence that socialism be founded on compulsory duty to give our time and talents to society—on the duty of “from each according to their ability”? No, they don’t.

Do they discontinue their calls to replace our liberal right to privately control our work lives with “directly social labor”—that is, our individual work lives under society’s direct control? No, they don’t.

Déjà Vu All Over Again

Karl Marx’s status as a democratic socialist is not all that demonstrates that “democratic” socialism is not a new version of socialism. There are numerous facts that illustrate this reality.

For over a century, socialists have argued that socialism is synonymous with democracy. Earlier socialists claimed the socialist experiments of their day—which we know now as infamously totalitarian socialist regimes—were democratic. Most people today are unaware of these facts, and thus they assume the word “democratic” appended to “socialism” means democratic socialism is something new. It’s not.

To learn more, see the RFP papers “The Keto-Friendly Political Philosophy” and “Democratic Socialism? Déjà Vu All Over Again.”

Do they punt on their belief that socialism requires eliminating every aspect of capitalism, right down to the suppression of all buying and selling? No, they don't.

We could continue listing one disturbing belief of Marx and Engels after another, and we would discover that none of them change. The only change to their thinking—the one that leads Harrington to grant them democratic socialist status—relates to their beliefs about how a socialist society could be created.

Marx and Engels originally felt revolution was necessary to produce socialism. But according to Harrington, they eventually decided that socialism could also result from a democratic process. Harrington says Marx and Engels came to believe that the socialist goal

is to be achieved by democratic, parliamentary means, wherever possible.⁵

This change is *the* reason Harrington counts Marx and Engels as democratic socialists. It's a positive change, but is it a meaningful one? Achieving socialism by democratic means "wherever possible" leaves plenty of room for violent exceptions.

Yes, "wherever possible" represents a massive loophole in the requirement that socialism be created by "democratic, parliamentary means." But this is ultimately less important than the fact that all of Marx and Engels's other beliefs end up democratic socialist approved with no changes at all.

Marx and Engels are considered democratic socialists despite their many anti-liberal goals and beliefs. And that means one is free to believe what Marx and Engels believed and still be a democratic socialist today.

With this background on how Marx and Engels came to be democratic socialists, let's turn to the implications of this fact.

DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISM IS PLAIN OLD SOCIALISM

The first implication of Marx and Engels being counted as democratic socialists? It demonstrates that democratic socialism is really plain old socialism.

Harrington affirms Marx and Engels as democratic socialists because today's socialism remains Marxism. Democratic socialism is still defined by Marx's goals and beliefs, just as yesterday's socialism was. (And yesterday's socialism was also called democratic socialism in its time.⁶)

Fig. 1



“Long live the invincible banner of Marx-Engels-Lenin-Stalin!”

Fig. 2



“Long live the invincible banner of Marx-Engels-Lenin-Stalin!”

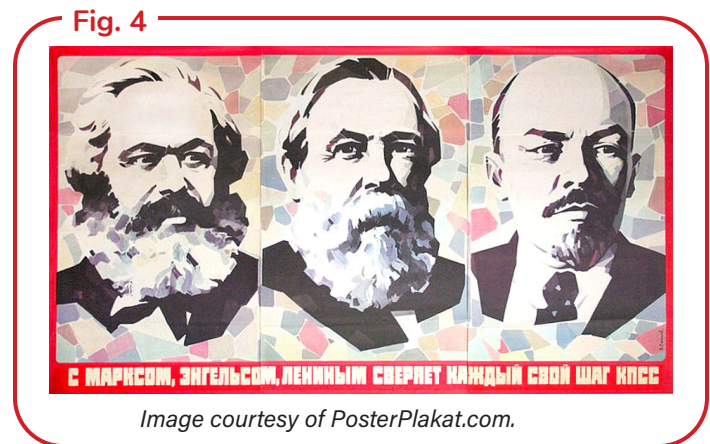


“Raise high the banner of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin!”

Fig. 3

Figs. 1–3: Three examples, with translation, of a genre of poster from the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics that imagined the USSR’s first dictators, Vladimir Lenin and Joseph Stalin, in continuity with the founding thinkers of socialism, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, who are celebrated today as “democratic” socialists. Marx’s theories were at the root of the USSR’s failures, as this paper argues. *Images courtesy of Anita Pisch, The Personality Cult of Stalin in Soviet Posters, 1929–1953: Archetypes, Inventions and Fabrications (Acton: ANU Press, 2016), 185. Used with permission.*

Posters from the USSR offer a small illustration of Marx and Engels's influence on earlier socialism (see figs. 1–8). The caption of the 1980s-era poster in fig. 4 explains how things worked in the USSR under the rule of the Communist Party. It reads, "The Communist Party is checking its every step with Marx, Engels and Lenin." What was the government of the USSR doing? It was striving to put itself in the same lineage as Marx and Engels, the most important socialists of all time.



If today's democratic socialists had developed a truly new version of socialism, surely Marx and Engels would have been pushed overboard first thing. Divorcing democratic socialism from these two, whose thinking is so tightly linked with earlier socialist nightmares, would make it clear that today's democratic socialism was actually a new product, not merely a marketing slogan.

But let's say that today's democratic socialists simply couldn't bring themselves to excommunicate Marx and Engels. They still could have explicitly and permanently rejected troubling aspects of the thinking of these two philosophers.

Had their goal been to create a genuinely new and democratic socialism, today's socialists could have formulated a list of anti-liberal aspects of Marx and Engels's philosophy that this improved version of socialism would forever disavow. Socialists who endorsed this list would have the right to call themselves democratic socialists. Those who didn't could be easily identified as anti-democratic socialists.

But there is no such list. Why? Because none of Marx's goals or beliefs have been definitively rejected by today's democratic socialism. Many today call themselves democratic socialists (what socialist doesn't?) despite ascribing to every single authoritarian view Marx held.

It's not only what one is permitted to believe while calling oneself a democratic socialist that remains unchanged from yesterday's socialism. The goal of today's socialism remains the same as well. Today's socialism, just as yesterday's, seeks to create a society based on the principle "from each according to their ability, to each according to their needs."

The specific wording of this socialist saying predates Karl Marx.⁷ But what propelled it into first place among socialist axioms is that Marx made it the defining goal of socialism. He famously (at least among socialists) said the sign that perfected socialism had arrived would be when socialist society could

inscribe on its banners: from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs!⁸

This goal Marx established became the goal of yesterday's socialism. For example, Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin tells us:

From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs!—such is the basis upon which the future collectivist system must be created.⁹

And what does DSA founder Michael Harrington say remains *clearly* the defining goal of today's socialism? He writes:

The goal of socialism, clearly, is to overcome greed and act on the basis of 'to each according to his/her need, from each according to his/her ability.'¹⁰

Harrington has reversed the order of the phrases, but otherwise the goal he lists is identical to that of the socialism of the USSR. Why? Because democratic socialism isn't a different product—it's the same old Marxism.

DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISTS FOR DUTY BEATING RIGHTS

The second implication of Marx and Engels being democratic socialists? One can be a democratic socialist while desiring to do away with liberalism.

Or more accurately, to be a democratic socialist, one *must* desire to do away with liberalism. By definition, a democratic socialist society means the end of critical aspects of liberalism: both liberalism's rejection of compulsory duty to give our abilities to society and its foundation on rights that protect minorities—not only from dictators but also from oppression by the majority.

Marx being counted as a democratic socialist demonstrates that democratic socialism is compatible with all of Marx's anti-liberal principles:

- **Marx considers the concept of human rights “obsolete verbal rubbish.”**

Democratic socialist Marx outright rejects the idea of human rights. He labels them “so-called rights”¹¹ and speaks about his “opposition” to the entire concept of rights.¹²

The fact that those who consider individual rights “obsolete verbal rubbish”¹³ as Marx does can still be democratic socialists makes it clear the term “democratic” has a very different meaning to socialists than it does to most of us.

Democratic socialism seeks a fundamental change to the basis of society: the switch from a liberal system that rejects the compulsory duty to put our time and talents under society’s control to a socialist system that requires it. We cannot retain our liberal rights under such a change, because they would interfere with socialism’s founding requirement to give our abilities to society.

- **Marx calls for the duty of “from each according to their ability.”**

Compulsory duty to society means that those running society can make you do things you would otherwise choose not to do. The liberalism that characterizes democracies like the United States rejects compulsory duties of this sort. Socialists themselves note that a requirement of duty analogous to that socialism demands is “strikingly absent” in both liberal philosophy¹⁴ and the US Constitution.¹⁵

Some today seem to be under the impression that democratic socialism is a version of socialism that doesn’t require compulsory duty to society. This is an entirely mistaken belief.

Democratic socialism seeks to create a society based on the duty of “from each according to their ability.”¹⁶ This is the *exact* standard of duty that socialism has demanded for the past 170 years.

Doubling Down on Duty

“From each according to their ability, to each according to their needs.” This is the most famous saying of socialism. Socialists such as DSA founder Harrington say that creating a society based on this axiom is socialism’s defining goal.

But did you know there’s an alternate version of this saying—one that retains the compulsory duty to give our time and talents to society but cancels the pledge to give to all based on their needs? And did you know that it’s this second version that would be employed initially, and likely forever, in any actual socialist society?

To learn more, see the RFP papers “Doubling Down on Duty” and “Our ‘So-Called’ Rights.”

In a democratic socialist society, all citizens would be under this duty—a duty that morphs our individual time and talents into society’s property to control. Marx makes it clear that socialist society would be based on this duty.¹⁷ He’s similarly explicit that “ideological nonsense”¹⁸ like rights would not be permitted to interfere with socialist citizens being made to do as society directs.¹⁹

- **Marx believes our time should be treated as society’s time and that we must “work in order to be able to eat.”**

Socialism’s requirement to give our abilities to society leads socialists to view the time in our lives as the property of society—as *society’s time*. That socialist theory treats the time in our lives as society’s time can be demonstrated in many ways, one being the socialist principle that slacking is theft.

Any number of socialist greats have said idleness is a “crime”²⁰ and that slackers are “thieves.”²¹ They do so because they see slackers as “stealing” society’s time. Given the socialist duty of “from each according to their ability” and the corollary belief that slacking is theft, another common socialist meme is that one must work in order to eat. Marx uses this maxim in connection with his call for mandatory child factory labor as part of education in socialist society.

Yes, democratic socialist Marx wanted child labor to be a standard in socialist education.²² What does Marx say is one benefit of making kids work in factories starting at age nine?²³ They would learn the lesson that it’s necessary “to work in order to be able to eat.”²⁴

Michael Harrington tells us Marx should not only be considered a democratic socialist but a “champion of human freedom.” Marx wanted a society based on compulsory duty, a society that makes factory labor part of every child’s schooling, and one in which rights are treated as “rubbish.” Yet he should be considered a champion of human freedom? Socialism must have a very different definition of freedom than most of us do.

As an understanding of Karl Marx’s principles makes clear, democratic socialism is not left-wing liberalism; it’s left-wing *anti*-liberalism. Democratic socialism rejects our liberal society’s lack of compulsory duty, and it belittles the rights liberalism extends us—rights that protect us from coercion by those claiming to act in the name of society.

Fig. 5



“Master the great theory of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin!”

Image courtesy of PosterPlakat.com.

DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISTS FOR AUTHORITARIANISM

A final important implication of Marx and Engels being democratic socialists? Marx and Engels are held to be democratic socialists despite their calls for a society based on numerous authoritarian policies. This means that those who today seek the same authoritarian ends are also welcome to call themselves democratic socialists. And unsurprisingly, they do.

- **Marx calls for the suppression of our “private labor” rights—that is, for the elimination of our right to individually control our work time.**

In our liberal society, we each have ultimate control over what we do workwise. Marx termed this individual control of our work “private labor”²⁵—“private” meaning under our personal management, as in “private property.”

Marx calls for socialist society to eliminate the private labor of capitalism and replace it with what he says is “its opposite, directly social labour.”²⁶ Directly social labor is Marx’s term for your work under direct management by society instead of under your individual, private control.

The socialist plan to abolish our private labor rights is another byproduct of socialism’s foundation on compulsory duty to society. It’s another demonstration that socialism treats our time as society’s time—as society’s property to control.

One is welcome to be a democratic socialist while calling for the suppression of our private labor rights. This reality is further illustrated by the thinking of present-day socialists such as Michael Lebowitz. Lebowitz considers socialism and democracy synonymous, yet he says the private labor rights we enjoy in liberal society are a “defect”—an “infection” that socialism must cure.²⁷

- **Marx desires the suppression of “parasites” and “useless” work.**

Still another byproduct of socialism’s foundation on the duty of “from each according to their ability” is its obsession with “parasites.” Socialist thinkers have used this word so often that it’s become a term of art in socialist philosophy.

A “parasite” is someone whom socialists judge to be failing to properly perform socialism’s requirement of duty. Socialist great Beatrice Webb even describes this duty as “a duty not to be a parasite.”²⁸

Hundreds of socialist thinkers, Marx and Engels included, attack those they see as parasites. One group that socialists call parasites are slackers—individuals who

don't give their full abilities to society as socialist duty requires. Socialists also label as parasites the millions of us whose work they consider "socially useless"—those whose work they deem, as Engels puts it, "at best superfluous."²⁹

Marx, Engels, and many other socialists call for socialist society to make allegedly "useless" and thus "parasitic" jobs illegal.³⁰ Those who hold these jobs would be made to work on other tasks—tasks those running socialist society approve as a valid use of what socialists see as society's time.

One can be a democratic socialist despite believing society should have the power to judge people as parasites and to make any number of supposedly "useless" jobs illegal.

- **Marx calls for the suppression of our right to run our own show.**

Marx's socialist vision calls for the elimination of the right to own a business.³¹ Even sole proprietorships in which one works individually—say as a craftsperson—would be illegal under Marx's socialism.³² Many people don't think of these individual operations as businesses, but they are to Marx.

One is welcome to be a democratic socialist despite desiring the suppression of businesses, both large and small—especially small, as we'll now see.

- **Marx desires the elimination of craft workshops, other small enterprises, and small farms.**

Marx and Engels are considered democratic socialists despite their disdain for and desire to suppress craftwork and small enterprises generally.

As socialists admit, "Marx completely rejects the craft ideal."³³ His view is that to work as a craftsperson makes one a pinhead.³⁴

Engels similarly has no use for small operations of any sort. He says the method by which socialism would achieve its "greatest savings of labor power" is by "fusing" small operations together to make large ones.³⁵

"Consciousness of the Pin"

Karl Marx wrote that working individually as the craftworker does leaves the worker with "the knowledge and consciousness of the pin." In other words, the worker ends up a pinhead—an idiot.

Marx was no fan of craftwork, and socialists even say that "Marx saw the destruction of craft skills as having an emancipatory significance." But socialism's anti-craft biases flow from many causes, not just Marx's disdain for the individual nature of craftwork.

To learn why socialism is fundamentally anti-craft, see the RFP paper "Why Socialism Says Craftwork Is 'Idiocy.'"

Socialist theory says that small-scale production breeds capitalism,³⁶ so it isn't surprising that socialists look forward to doing away with it. But Marx and Engels aren't just against small production; they strongly favor the largest-scale production possible. For example, they call for "industrial armies" to be used not only in manufacturing but "especially for agriculture."³⁷

These two democratic socialists believe large industry is essential for socialism. They feel this way not just because large industry means increased production, but also because it's Marx view that when one works in a large factory or on a collectivized farm, one "strips off the fetters of one's individuality" and is molded into the type of person who will make a good socialist.³⁸

Marx and Engels's advocacy of large-scale agricultural production led to the forced collectivization of farming in the USSR, the People's Republic of China, and elsewhere. The result? The starvation deaths of millions due to the wonders of socialist planning.³⁹

- **Marx calls for the suppression of every aspect of our capitalist society—even buying and selling.**

Marx never wavered in his belief that achieving socialism means eliminating all aspects of capitalism and the capitalist market economy. Neither did Engels. Their socialism even requires the suppression of buying, selling, and money.⁴⁰

Marx and Engels are democratic socialists despite these plans. And today's democratic socialists are also welcome to ascribe to these authoritarian yet mainline socialist goals—mainline because they are the goals of Karl Marx.

If anyone suggests that the goal of democratic socialism is merely to modify capitalism and not to replace it with a radically different society, they've been misled or are looking to mislead you.

That's also true of anyone who claims that the goal of democratic socialism is only to make the US system of social benefits similar to that found in Scandinavian countries. Knowledgeable socialists are well aware that democratic socialist Karl Marx would roar with laughter at the notion that modern Scandinavian nations represent socialist societies.

If the desire to suppress our private labor rights, suppress alleged parasites, suppress small businesses, and so on sounds like something right out of the playbook of bad old socialism, that's because it is. These are the very same authoritarian principles on which the socialist experiments of the past were founded. But now we discover that they're democratic-socialist approved.

The bottom line is that you're welcome to call yourself a democratic socialist while pursuing any authoritarian plan whatsoever. You just need to tell yourself that you hope to achieve these goals by "democratic, parliamentary means, wherever possible."⁴¹

Today's democratic socialists certainly don't wish for the mass murder that repeatedly resulted from earlier socialist experiments. But this wasn't the desire or expectation of Marx and Engels either. They were somehow oblivious to the same issue that today's socialists incredulously remain blind to: the danger that a system based on compulsory duty and the suppression of rights will end up not simply authoritarian but full-blown totalitarian.

"DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISM"—A MARKETING SLOGAN

Karl Marx is a democratic socialist. Friedrich Engels is too. These two most important socialist thinkers are said to be democratic socialists despite their anti-liberal goals and beliefs.

Why are Marx and Engels democratic socialists? Because democratic socialism is plain old socialism, not some new version.

Today's socialism—just like yesterday's socialism—is defined by the thinking of Karl Marx. And yesterday's socialism—just like today's—was sold as democratic. The reality is that, for over a century, socialists have maintained that socialism is by definition democratic, that *socialism is democracy*.⁴²

But as the results of earlier socialist experiments that were said to be democratic make clear, hoping socialism will turn out democratic doesn't make it so. Even having the best of intentions doesn't make those intentions come true. And this is assuredly the case when you support a philosophy based on the dangerous duty of "from each according to their ability:"

Here on planet Earth, the duty to give our time and talents to society will forever really mean the duty to give our time and talents to those running society. Socialist duty gives those running society incredible power over our individual lives. This is the very reason that liberal philosophy rejects such a duty, no matter whether this duty is to a king or queen, to fascists calling themselves "the community," or to socialists calling themselves "society."

Socialism's foundation on the duty of "from each according to their ability" is the irreparable design defect that makes every experiment with democratic socialism an

authoritarian accident waiting to happen. It's an irreparable defect because socialism is not only based on the belief that mandatory duty is morally correct, but also requires this duty in order to function. If we're left free to do as we wish, as opposed to being under a duty to do what "society" demands, socialism is impossible.⁴³

If anyone tells you democratic socialism is something new, please ask them to explain how that's possible when Karl Marx is considered a democratic socialist. Ask them to explain how democratic socialism can be a new type of socialism when today's democratic socialists are free to ascribe to every bit of Marx's anti-liberal thinking—the same thinking that's defined every prior socialist human rights disaster.

"Democratic" socialism: it's a marketing slogan, not a new version of socialism.

Fig. 6



“One Branch of Science”

Fig. 7



“Long live the invincible banner of Marx-Engels-Lenin-Stalin!”

Fig. 8



“Long live the great unconquerable flag of Marx-Engels-Lenin-Stalin!”

Figs. 4–6: Three more examples, with translation, of a genre of poster from the USSR that imagined its first dictators in continuity with the founding thinkers of socialism. Images courtesy of Anita Pisch, *Personality Cult of Stalin in Soviet Posters*. Used with permission.

NOTES

1. Michael Harrington, *The Twilight of Capitalism* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1976), v.
2. Harrington, *Twilight of Capitalism*, v.
3. Michael Harrington, *Socialism, Past and Future* (New York: Mentor, 1992), 47.
4. Michael Harrington, *Socialism* (New York: Saturday Review Press, 1970), 57. Please also note Harrington's use of the term "social democrat" here. He's used it as a synonym of "democratic socialist." Some of today's democratic socialists attempt to differentiate between democratic socialists and social democrats, but Harrington uses these terms interchangeably in the cited book.
5. Harrington, *Socialism, Past and Future*, 47.
6. For example, Eugene Debs, Beatrice Webb, and other celebrated socialists claimed that the USSR was democratic socialism in action. To see quotes and details, read the RFP paper "Democratic Socialism? Déjà Vu All Over Again."
7. "From each according to his ability, to each according to his need" is the most famous saying of socialism because Karl Marx made it socialism's defining goal. The concept behind the saying, and even its exact phrasing, was already in use by socialists prior to Marx. Louis Blanc is generally credited with developing the specific wording in the 1840s. In 1848, he wrote: "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). However, Étienne Cabet was using the phrase in that period as well.
8. Karl Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, in *Marx/Engels Selected Works* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1950), 2:23.
9. Joseph Stalin, "Anarchism or Socialism?," in *Collected Works* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1954), 1:338.
10. Michael Harrington, "What Socialists Would Do in America—If They Could," *Dissent*, Fall 1978, 445.
11. Karl Marx, "On the Jewish Question," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert Tucker (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1978), 40. See the RFP paper "Our 'So-Called' Rights."
12. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology*, 3rd rev. ed. (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976), 225. See also the RFP paper "Our 'So-Called' Rights."
13. Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, 23.
14. Joseph Carens, "Rights and Duties in an Egalitarian Society," *Political Theory* 14, no. 1 (February 1986): 31.
15. Sidney Webb and Beatrice Webb, *Soviet Communism: A New Civilisation*, 3rd ed. (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1944), 437.

NOTES

16. Michael Harrington writes: “The goal of socialism, clearly, is to overcome greed and act on the basis of ‘to each according to his/her need, from each according to his/her ability.’” Harrington, “What Socialists Would Do in America,” 445.

17. Marx endorsed the concept of “from each according to their ability,” which has been the socialist standard of duty for over 170 years and remains so today (Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, 23). In *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx and co-author Friedrich Engels list “equal liability of all to labour” as one key requirement of socialist society (Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, in Tucker, *Marx-Engels Reader*, 352). And, as discussed elsewhere in this paper and detailed in the RFP paper “Karl Marx’s ‘Education of the Future,’” Marx called for school children to perform factory labor as part of their education, with the goal of teaching them the necessity “to work in order to eat.” Socialist citizens were to be drilled in the importance of performing labor as society directs, starting at age nine.

18. Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, 23. See the RFP paper “Our ‘So-Called’ Rights.”

19. Any number of Marx’s ideas demonstrate his belief that individual rights (what he considered “nonsense” and “rubbish”) should not interfere with our duty to do as society directs. For example, Marx called for a socialist society in which the “society distributes labour power and means of production between the various branches of industry” (Karl Marx, *Capital*, trans. Ben Fowkes and David Fernbach, 3 vols. [London: Penguin Classics, 1978–1981], 2:434). To distribute our labor power (that is, our time and talents applied to work) is to distribute us. How does socialist society get the authority to distribute us as it desires? Socialism requires duty to society, overriding our right to use our lives as we wish.

20. E.g., “No one can without committing a crime shirk labor” (“Nul n’a pu sans crime soustraire au travail”). Gracchus Babeuf, *Analyse de la doctrine de Babeuf, tribun du peuple: proscrit par le Directoire exécutif pour avoir dit la vérité* (Paris: 1796), 1. See the RFP paper “Why Socialism Says Slacking Is Theft.”

21. “They are slackers, that is to say thieves” (“Il y a des fainéants, c’est-à-dire des voleurs”). Henri de Saint Simon, “L’Industrie,” *Œuvres de Saint-Simon & d’Enfantin* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1868), 18:130.

22. As one example of the multiple times Marx promoted the idea of mandatory factory labor as part of education, Marx writes “every child whatever, from the age of nine years, ought to become a productive labourer in the same way that no able-bodied adult person ought to be exempted from the general law of nature, viz.: to work in order to be able to eat.” Saul K. Padover, ed., *Karl Marx on the First International* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1973), 26.

23. Padover, *Karl Marx on the First International*, 26.

24. Padover, *Karl Marx on the First International*, 26.

25. Marx, *Capital*, 1:165.

26. Marx, *Capital*, 1:188n.

27. Michael Lebowitz, *The Socialist Imperative: From Gotha to Now* (New York: Monthly Review, 2015), 67.

28. Webb and Webb, *Soviet Communism*, 437.

29. Friedrich Engels, “Speeches in Elberfeld,” in *Marx Engels Collected Works*, vol 4., *Marx and Engels 1844–1845* (Chadwell Heath: Lawrence and Wishart, 2010), 248.

30. See the RFP paper “The Socialist Obsession.”

31. “The proletariat will use its political supremacy to wrest, by degrees, all capital from the bourgeoisie, to centralize all instruments of production in the hands of the State. ... Of course, in the beginning, this cannot be effected except by the means of despotic inroads on the rights of property.” Marx and Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, 352.

NOTES

32. As seen in the note directly above, Marx and Engels call for the entire elimination of private enterprise and for the state to have complete control of the “means of production.” This by definition means that their vision—what we are told is a democratic socialist vision—is of a society in which you have no right to start your own small workshop of any sort.

33. Sean Sayers, “The Concept of Labor: Marx and His Critics,” *Science and Society* 71, no. 4 (October 2007), 449. See the RFP paper “Why Socialism Says Craftwork Is ‘Idiocy.’”

34. Karl Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1956; orig. 1847), 144.

35. Engels, “Speeches in Elberfeld,” 252.

36. For example, socialist great Vladimir Lenin reports: “Unfortunately, small production is still very, very widespread in the world, and small production *engenders* capitalism and the bourgeoisie continuously, daily, hourly, spontaneously, and on a mass scale.” Vladimir Lenin, “*Left-Wing*” *Communism, An Infantile Disorder* (New York: International Publishers, 1940), 10. See the RFP paper “Why Socialism Says Craftwork Is ‘Idiocy.’”

37. Marx and Engels call for the “establishment of industrial armies, especially for agriculture” in their most famous work, *The Communist Manifesto*. Marx and Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, 352.

38. “When the worker co-operates in a planned way with others [as the worker does in a factory, but not when working individually as a craftsperson], he strips off the fetters of his individuality, and develops the capabilities of his species.” Marx, *Capital*, 1:447.

A good discussion of Marx’s view that the social nature of work in large industry develops people ready for socialism is found in G. A. Cohen, “Marx’s Dialectic of Labor,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 3, no. 3 (Spring 1974): 243–46.

And Bertell Ollman explains that Marx’s desire for “industrial armies” is not only about boosting production but also “changing the personalities of those involved.” One would assume that this personality change was not intended to make them desire their own small businesses but rather to make them into good socialist citizens. Bertell Ollman, “Marx’s Vision of Communism,” *Dialectic Marxism*, accessed August 21, 2019, https://www.nyu.edu/projects/ollman/docs/vision_of_communism.php.

Finally, Marx’s belief that work in large industry would mold people into good socialists is further demonstrated by his desire to incorporate factory labor into child education in socialist society. See the RFP paper, “Karl Marx’s ‘Education of the Future.’”

39. It’s Marx and Engels’s advocacy of large-scale agricultural production, of “industrial armies, especially for agriculture,” that led to the forced collectivization of farming in the USSR, the People’s Republic of China, and elsewhere. The result? The starvation death of millions. Estimates of the number of deaths caused by these human-caused famines exceed 50 million. Two excellent works on the subject, respectively on the catastrophes in the USSR and in the People’s Republic of China, are Anne Applebaum, *Red Famine: Stalin’s War on the Ukraine* (New York: Doubleday, 2017); and Frank Dikötter, *Mao’s Great Famine: The History of China’s Most Devastating Catastrophe, 1958–1962* (New York: Walker Publishing, 2010).

40. Marx, Engels, and an untold number of socialists since them say that a socialist society is to be one in which there is no buying or selling of goods and services, and not even money. By Marx’s definition, a society with buying, selling, and money *cannot* be a socialist one. A key reason for Marx’s desire to abolish buying, selling, and money is that he considers this the only method of eliminate what he called “alienation.”

What’s alienation? Noted socialist Eric Fromm defines Marx’s complex concept as what happens when “man does not experience himself as the acting agent ... but ... the world (nature, others, and he himself) remain alien to him.” Erich Fromm, *Marx’s Concept of Man* (New York, Frederick Unger Publishing, 1971), 44.

That explanation of “alienation” probably doesn’t clarify much, but this is no fault of Mr. Fromm’s. It’s a dense concept that only a far longer explanation might begin to untangle. But a deeper exploration of its meaning is actually an unnecessary distraction, since the key point is that Marx’s goal was to end alienation, and

NOTES

this in turn was only possible, to his thinking, by eliminating the market economy based on buying, selling, and money. Why? Because these are what cause alienation in the first place.

Marx says that alienation is the automatic result of the production of commodities (goods made to be sold to others rather than for direct consumption) that characterizes capitalist society. Commodity production is itself the automatic result of the fact that production in capitalist society is fragmented across many independent producers—what hundreds of socialists’ label “the anarchy of production.” The production of goods by fragmented producers requires exchanging those goods as commodities, which leads to buying, selling, and money.

Thus, to eliminate alienation, socialist society would eliminate all private producers, all buying, selling, and money. One of the many obvious implications of such a world is that it would be one without any independent small or craft producers. It would also be a world in which it would be literally illegal to sell things you no longer needed. What type of authoritarian state would be required in such a world?

Marx called for two stages of socialist society: a transitional stage following capitalism and a “higher phase” of perfected socialism. In the higher phase, socialist society would have (in theory) boosted production volumes so massively that every good and service humans need would be available in quantities greater than demand, permitting them to be distributed for free (see the RFP paper “The Secret Sauce of Socialism”). If everything were free, there would obviously be no need for buying, selling, and money.

But Marx even called for the end of buying, selling, and money as part of the first phase of socialist society and before the fantasyland of free everything for all had arrived courtesy of what Marx called “constant over-production.” In this first phase of socialism, when goods would still be in scarce supply, Marx proposed that buying and selling still be ended by the socialist state taking ownership of all businesses large and small and producing all goods by a prearranged plan. He proposed that money be replaced by a voucher system in which workers would receive chits reflecting the quantity of their work and could then surrender these for goods at a government store (as they would be the only stores). It would be illegal to trade vouchers with others. They would not circulate as money does but would rather be analogous to a movie ticket—only good for exchange in one place.

It remains exceedingly common for today’s socialists to attack capitalism as the cause of alienation (a concept almost no one understands but that we all know sounds bad) and to suggest that socialism would mean the end of alienation. But when they do, they almost always fail to explain that *any* society that has buying, selling, and money is a society that will suffer from what Marx called alienation. They fail to explain that the only means of curing alienation is to create a world with zero private businesses, no buying or selling, and no money. But surely such a world is a cure far worse than the disease.

The Khmer Rouge in “Democratic Kampuchea”—Cambodia—performed a real-world experiment with Marx’s idea of eliminating markets and money. Untold thousands died as a direct result. For an overview of the Cambodian disaster, including the decision to eliminate money, buying, and selling, see David P. Chandler, *Brother Number One: A Political Biography of Pol Pot*, rev. ed. (Boulder, Westview Press, 1999).

Despite the Cambodian experience, the desire among socialists to fulfill Marx’s dream still burns bright. Any number of socialists remain loyal to these dangerous ideas. For example, see Anitra Nelson and Frans Timmerman, *Life Without Money: Building Fair and Sustainable Economies* (London: Pluto Press, 2011).

Thus, one can desire a world in which all businesses large and small have been taken over by the government, a world in which it is illegal to buy or sell anything, a world in which money is done away with as part of the plan to make buying and selling impossible—one can be committed to all these things and still be a democratic socialist.

41. Harrington, *Socialism, Past and Future*, 47

42. See the RFP paper “Democratic Socialism? Déjà Vu All Over Again.”

43. Socialism starts from the belief the individual should be subservient to society and do society’s bidding. Thus socialists say, for example, that individualism should be redefined to mean “the efficient use of the whole

NOTES

individual” for society’s benefit (Ernesto “Che” Guevara, “On Economic Planning in Cuba [April 30, 1961],” in *Venceremos! The Speeches and Writings of Che Guevara*, ed. John Gerassi [New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968], 115).

From the socialist standpoint, being born owing our time and talents to society is morally correct. Thus, it’s hardly surprising that socialists would develop a philosophy that operates from the assumption that all individuals would be under mandatory duty to society and that required this duty to function.

Socialism is based on the idea of “social control”—control by society. Without the ability to override our individual rights through duty to society, there would be no way for socialism to implement the required social control.

There are multiple reasons socialism requires mandatory duty to function and implement “social control.” For example, unless we are under the requirement to give our time and talents to society, there would be no way for socialist society to channel our work into activities socialist society approves as “socially useful”—in contrast to those activities that “waste” our time, such as are permitted today in our liberal society. In our liberal society without mandatory duty, we are left free to pursue essentially any career we consider personally useful regardless of how “socially useful” others may judge it to be. Socialist theory says that creating a socialist society requires the elimination of “socially useless” work so that all are working on priorities set by society. This requirement in turn necessitates our being under mandatory duty to give our abilities to society.