

In Defense of Marxism¹

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Abstract: After an extended period in which Marxism received relatively little attention, many of its tenets are now playing a more important role within the left. This essay argues for the relevance today of a number of Marx's major themes. The Marx I offer here is a conservative Marx. I base this view on his insistence that socialism is needed not to make us perfect but to save society, in a general sense, from the threats of destruction that it encounters under capitalism. His criticism of utopianism requires that change be anchored in steps humanity has prepared itself to take, rather than in steps that it has no reason to believe will be effective. The importance of class has survived attacks on it as a relic of industrialism and the dominance of the male proletariat. But the working class is more extensive than it ever was. It now encompasses diverse races, genders, and cultures in what can become a front against capitalism. Finally, Marx's politics posits an inversion of the power relation in capitalist society with capitalism's subordination of citizens to the state. The global ferment against the failures of capitalism opens new possibilities for the growth of anti-capitalist currents.

Much of what I say will depend on the idea that Marxian socialism is not an ideal but a practical necessity. Those who see it as capturing all that is good and noble will find the reality of socialism disappointing. In the Marxian view, socialism attempts to put a stop to capitalism's ever-more serious threats to social life. As capitalism develops new powers, it damages further its own capacity to sustain society. The failures of socialism to establish a lasting and less distorted presence are useful lessons rather than

1. This article differs in minor respects from one with the same title that appeared in *Taking Socialism Seriously*, ed. Anatole Anton and Richard Schmitt (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2012).

signs of impossibility. The twentieth century was one of socialist defeats, but also of new socialist initiatives that built on lessons from those defeats. I refer extensively to Marx to suggest that his version of socialism is not vulnerable to common critiques of it. Moreover, extensions of his version of socialism account for matters commonly thought to make his views outdated.

1. Socialism or Barbarism

Goals lie behind our struggles. The goal that many of us on the left look for is not the best of worlds but a world with fewer threats of disaster. The imperative for change then comes from the goal of avoiding disaster. We are worried about wars, rape, economic crises, and global warming since they pose a threat to society itself. Deepening economic inequality worries us for its potential to weaken the society through creating misery and bitterness. Since certain features of present society are threatening present society, we on the left think we must try to change those features in order to avoid a path leading to social collapse. One needs to change the society's culture of individualism and militarism, its racial, gender, and class barriers, and its sacrifice of nature for profits. The changes we advocate must be steps to avoiding threats to the existence of the kinds of relations among people that allow them to see themselves as belonging to a society. Changes must then be ones that do not pose a threat to society. Isn't saving society a conservative rather than a leftist undertaking? Conservatives certainly share with the left this goal of saving society. The difference is that in the name of defending society conservatives want to preserve features of society that may now favor certain groups in it but in the long-run put the society itself in jeopardy. This may seem paradoxical. Conservatives will say that the left cannot change society without destroying it. This is because for them, saving society means keeping those of its features that the left wants to eliminate in order to save it.

Societies can come with many different attributes. They may be Protestant, male dominated, poor, capitalist, or authoritarian. But beyond having attributes like these, which often change without a collapse of the society, societies of all different kinds have attributes of another kind. These are the attributes making up what we call the "social bond." A breakdown of the social bond will involve people not trusting one another, not wanting to help one another, and not finding enjoyment in the company of one another. Where trust, solidarity, and conviviality cease to be widespread, a social breakdown is on its way. (The general point here does not depend on whether it is precisely these three features and not some others that make up the social bond.)

The failures of certain other features of society can occasion a breakdown, but they do so through undermining one or another of the three features I have mentioned. A society needs to rely on diverse skills and resources. Without them members of the society will not wait to die while stoically maintaining

the social bond. Rather some will see a chance to avoid starvation by preying on others. In this way they undermine trust, solidarity, and conviviality.

Both conservatives and the left would like to avoid breakdowns of society. They will try to change those features of the society they believe contribute to the breakdown. They tend to disagree on what needs changing. There may be disagreement over the claim that continuing to release large quantities of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere will lead to food and water shortages that force people into mass migrations in search of life's necessities. Those who accept this claim will say it is imperative to try to save society on Earth by steps that will reduce those releases.

I want now to leave aside controversies such as this one about the environment in order to look from one side only at a less global threat. Wars in a country can be so disruptive that they lead to the breakdown of its society. The occupation of Iraq by the US and others in 2003, led to a period of internecine conflict in which ordinary Iraqi citizens feared walking in the streets, suffered from failures of public services, and worried that a knock on the door might be that of the occupier. There was a social collapse, which had been in the making a decade earlier due to restrictions on imports intended to provoke a coup to oust Saddam Hussein. Such a social collapse does not rule out a rebirth of the society as conditions improve. The old customs and ways of organizing and enjoying life can return, but the period of collapse is a trauma during which there is no assurance of reconstruction.

How does this relate to Marxism? Let us start with Marx's notion of alienation, on which he based his early critique of capitalism. Alienation for him embodied the idea of social collapse. The reason is that both alienation from the product of work when the owner takes it away and alienation from life when earning a wage becomes its aim are "realized and expressed in the relationship in which a person stands to other persons." That is, they show up in their effects on society. In saying how these forms of alienation show up, Marx does not mention anything purely internal to persons but instead he mentions the alienation of persons from their "species-being." This for him meant alienation from social life, which is the life of the species. Thus, the alienation from species-being resulting from the wage system is "the *estrangement of person from person*."² The tendency of capitalist society toward social collapse is present *en nuce* in its wage relation. In later work, Marx points out how economic crises manifest this tendency toward collapse.

One doesn't wait until a social collapse is taking place to call people together to make needed changes in society. By then, the task becomes one of rebuilding a society from memories of what it was like to have had one. This

2. Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, in *Marx/Engels Collected Works* (hereafter *MECW*, followed by the volume number) (New York: International Publishers), vol. 3, "Estranged Labor," 277.

was the task of the Darfurians after they fled in the mid-2000s from murder, rapine, and arson in Sudan to refugee camps across the border in Chad. Perhaps, there was nothing they could have done alone to avoid this collapse. But in general, it is imperative to anticipate a collapse by taking action to avert it. This involves changing the society without destroying it, despite the danger that in operating the patient will die. But the more likely danger follows from a failure to respond to signs of impending collapse by decisive action.

There are signs of threats to social viability in capitalist societies. There is permanent warfare, deepening divisions between rich and poor, a reluctance to limit the burning of hydrocarbons, and an addiction of the major banks to fictitious capital—capital not backed up by the value of what is actually being produced.³ There is no guarantee that enough of us will recognize these threats and ask how we can avoid them. Socialists connect these threats to the tendency of capitalism for the unlimited growth of capital made possible by sharing as little as possible of that growth with labor. Marx and Engels said that in such circumstances, “Society suddenly finds itself put back into a state of momentary barbarism.”⁴

However, socialism is not solely about economic change. Capitalism has weakened the social bond, thereby eroding trust, solidarity, and conviviality. Replacing the wage system with joint ownership of productive forces will be possible only if one takes steps to repair the damage done to the social bond by capitalism. We can strengthen *trust* through a system in which people know their voices count. Democracy in the workplace and in the public forum becomes another part of the socialist project since it builds trust and overcomes suspicion. We can strengthen *solidarity* by having a system in which people do not act only for their own race, class, or nation. So the socialist project will strengthen solidarity by incentives for people to view their capacities as social assets⁵ rather than simply as means of personal or group advantage. We can strengthen *conviviality* by education for enjoyment and not just for achievement. In sum, socialism is not merely a novel mode of production but is a kind of society defined as well by its brand of democracy, equality, and education. To save society socialism must change it in these directions.

Agitation for socialism is one among various possible kinds of joint action aimed at avoiding a social collapse. With few exceptions, all sides call for changes in the society that will allow it to avoid collapse. So, socialism as a new

3. See the account of the growing dependency of capitalism on such fictitious capital in David Harvey, *The Enigma of Capital* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 30.

4. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Communist Manifesto*, MECW 6, Part 1, 490.

5. “Social asset” is John Rawls’s felicitous phrase used in discussing whether gains from natural talents belong to those with them, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), §17, p. 107.

form of society is not a good we pursue for itself, but a means to avoid social collapse. This is compatible with saying that socialism is an end we can reach only by building it on basic social relations. For this tells us only that we need those social relations to build socialism, not that achieving socialism is why we want to live in social relations with one another. Socialism can perform the necessary task of ending capitalism without being sufficient for setting aside all threats of collapse. Doing away with capitalism can avoid economic bubbles, rapid depletion of resources, unbalanced growth, and accelerated global warming. But ending capitalism is not sufficient since the society that a post-capitalist world inherits is a damaged one. To repair it, we must build trust through democracy and take other measures, including ending oppression. In section 4, I discuss the joining of movements against exploitation of labor and oppression of women and minorities within the socialist movement.

2. Utopians and Socialists

There is, though, another tendency among socialists. For those in this other tendency, socialism aims to provide humans with their highest level of development, with complete harmony, or with the greatest happiness. I call this the *perfectionist* tendency. The tendency I support adopts socialism because we need it to thwart the drift toward social collapse. I call this the *minimalist* tendency since for it the aim of socialism is avoiding threats to society rather than full human development, total harmony, or maximum happiness. For the minimalist, society must be the context in which people can pursue various forms of perfection. Society may have to change in order to be able to pursue full humanity, to pursue complete harmony, or to reach greatest happiness. But those changes are for those perfections rather than for saving the society. The minimalist would pursue a sustainable environment, not for the sake of the environment, but ultimately because sustaining society depends on the environment.

Of course, continued social existence will need a certain degree of freedom, harmony, and happiness without requiring full perfection. But then they are no longer ends for which society is a mere means, since they have become means for social survival. Thus, the “free development of each,” as opposed to “the power to subjugate the labor of others,” is for Marx the condition needed to avoid the threat to society inherent in the subjugation of labor.⁶

Shouldn’t we find this perspective perverse? For, it seems obvious that one would want socialism because it would bring freedom, equality, humanity, and justice. But Marx was right to criticize as utopian those reformers of his day who appealed to these values as the aim of socialism. Of course, he revered these values, but for him they made perfectly good sense when seen as values to guide us in a social struggle rather than the end of it. He said,

6. Marx and Engels, *Communist Manifesto*, MECW 6, Part 1, 500.

“Justice’, ‘humanity’, ‘freedom’ etc. may demand this or that a thousand times over; but if the thing is impossible it does not take place and in spite of everything remains an ‘empty figment of a dream.’” Marx pointed to the “individual enthusiasts for universal suffrage” who promoted the Peoples’ Charter from 1838 right through to its final defeat in 1848. But to be more than an abstract dogma, Marx argued that universal suffrage “presupposed a long and arduous unification of the English workers into a class.” Yet this unification was precisely what was missing. Marx concluded that it was utopian to “separate political forms from their social foundations and present them as general, abstract dogmas.”⁸ So in this case, we should work for the kind of society for which universal suffrage would be a useful support.

This calls for some elaboration. We have been talking about two strategies for change. The one puts the emphasis on following some norm. This strategy starts from violations of a norm by an individual or an organization and offers returning to the norm as a solution. It fails to emphasize how circumstances, including features of the society, encourage those violations.⁹ The result is that calls for fairness, peace, equality, and tolerance multiply without changing circumstances responsible for the violation of these norms. Banners and bumper stickers calling for fairness, peace, and other norms are no substitute for concrete plans to change certain features of society. So, this strategy is clearly utopian in a Marxian sense.

The other strategy, which is Marx’s non-utopian strategy, emphasizes protecting society. It starts by taking note of the challenges. Unlike the first strategy, this one takes note of the circumstances, including the features of society, which can be the source of these challenges. Perhaps, a feature of the society is its tendency to make enemies outside it. Or perhaps it is alienating internal groups. So long as these tendencies are unchecked, they will undercut appeals for change coming from familiar ethical norms. In other words, the norms of fairness, peace, and respect for life will not be able to serve their purpose of protecting society. These norms will show up on banners, in the pieties of human rights reports, and at political conventions. But their effects will not go beyond these limited contexts. In order for ethical norms to serve their purpose, the circumstances must change. Challenges must weaken undisputed leaders. The aggrieved must organize. The press must assert its independence. Of course in this strategy, ethical values will work together with changing the social circumstances. The point is that justice, peace, and the rest

7. Karl Marx, “Democratic Pan-Slavism,” *MECW* 8, 365.

8. Karl Marx, “The *Débat Social* on Democratic Association,” *MECW* 6, 539.

9. Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (New York: Henry Holt, 2007), 118–21.

will not have an important role if they lack ties to struggles for deep changes in the social circumstances.¹⁰

The theme that Marxist socialism is a minimalist rather than a perfectionist project comes from Marxist opposition to utopianism. Perfectionist socialism would have socialism serve utopian ideals rather than social survival. Serving social survival means avoiding paths that would significantly increase the likelihood of a breakdown of social relations. Full human development, unbroken harmony, and the greatest possible happiness belong, as Richard Rorty says, to the language of poetry, not of politics.¹¹ Maintaining a viable society allows people to rely on a fundamental social bond. It does not assure them, as a perfectionist society would, that their society lacks flaws. Why not then opt for perfectionist socialism? The reason is that there are no realizable changes in actual social structure that would make it possible to have the values of development, harmony, and happiness that are inherent in perfectionist socialism. Without this possibility, the perfectionist option is utopian.

Does the critique of utopianism help to avoid mistakes? Engels admits that he and Marx were wrong about the socialist potential of both the revolution of 1848 and that of 1870.¹² They had overestimated the readiness of the working class to bring socialism. But these failures made them take into account the importance of circumstances they had underestimated. For example, by the third quarter of the century, Marx and Engels both felt that changed circumstances required adopting peaceful struggle alongside street action.

But the strength of anti-utopianism did not become evident until later. Most of those who claimed to be Marxists failed to avoid Marx’s strictures on utopianism. The social democrats, many of whom acted in the name of Marx, made the reform of capitalism the value they pursued. Reforming it would end the destructive course of capitalism thereby eliminating the need for ending capitalism. But the social democrats could not realize this hope given the way the inherent drive of capitalism for growth had structured the society. So capitalism underwent only those reforms that did not cripple its inherent drive. Capitalism then threatened society everywhere by leading the world into the most horrific wars, the direst poverty, and an unprecedented assault on nature.

10. This view did not originate with Marx, since it is found already in Hume where he speaks of the circumstances of justice. David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739), book 3, part 2, section 2.

11. Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 34, 43; and *Essays on Heidegger and Others* (New York, Cambridge University Press, 1991), 17–20.

12. Friedrich Engels, “Introduction to Karl Marx’s *The Class Struggle in France*,” *MECW* 27, 510–13.

Another form of utopianism that claimed to be Marxist was state socialism. It grew from the need a new socialist regime had to defend itself from internal and external opposition. But it turned the power to defend itself from a means into its leading value. The goal of saving state power replaced the goal of avoiding social breakdown. Without guidance by the aim of avoiding social breakdown, state power ultimately destroyed society.

Trying to realize a value is not a utopian endeavor simply because one cannot realize it through a single campaign. Instead, it is always reasonable to try to realize a value provided one can envisage a series of steps, each plausibly leading to the one following it, which ends in its realization.

We can illustrate this historical approach by the process of getting broad acceptance for school integration in the US. School integration would have been a utopian wish during the period of slavery. But Afro-American militancy after World War I led to a ban on white-only unions in the American Federation of Labor. The circumstances making that step possible had the potential to lead to circumstances in which desegregation in other areas could take place. So after World War II, President Truman integrated the US military. These and other steps showed the potential for developing circumstances for advancing toward an end to school segregation. It was certainly no longer utopian to hold that Afro-Americans could win acceptance by most Americans for school integration.

3. Oppression and Exploitation

There are, to be sure, other forms of inequality and lack of freedom than those connected directly with the economy. There are various forms of oppression—national, racial, gender, bureaucratic, and homophobic. We express opposition to these forms of oppression in pleas for fairness. But the substance of these pleas for fairness comes from the worry that a society, small or large, weakens its resistance to collapse by addiction to any form of oppression. This worry encourages efforts to eliminate oppression, thereby eliminating a major source of social decline due both to agitation by the oppressed and internal decay of the oppressor. By stressing the effect on society, this approach does not deny the importance of compassion for the oppressed. But, compassion for those who suffer is not enough for justice. Liberals and socialists alike want justice for the oppressed and understand the damage that oppression can do to a society. Their differences arise not over the poisonous effects of oppression but over how to combat it.

Must socialists view oppression as merely a side effect of exploitation? There is a relation between oppression and exploitation within a mode of production but the relation is not that oppression owes its existence to exploitation. In each economic age, the forms of oppression will have a distinctive character since they exist within the dominant economic context of that age.

The general rule is that in different contexts, familiar actions will fail to have the same effects. Racial oppression in the US South changed as wage labor and share cropping replaced slavery. In the slave context, acquiring labor is a capital investment involving a commitment to maintain it, whereas in the free labor context, acquiring labor is a commitment to pay for the use of labor power for a given time leaving laborers to purchase the means to maintain themselves.

Marx illustrates through several examples the way a given economic context affects features also found in other economic contexts. No one of those contexts generates the affected feature. He says that the kind of economy is important in giving a society its dominant characteristic. Thus, ancient Rome had a political society, the Middle Ages had a religious society, and nineteenth-century England had a materialist society.¹³ But politics, religion, and materialism were also present in all three societies. The different economies merely selected which of the three features would be dominant in any of the three societies. Thus, none of the three features was the product of any of the three economies. He makes a similar point about co-operation in production. For us today, co-operation is a kind of networking that goes on among a corporation's employees, who may work in different facilities spread across the globe. This is very different from the working together that took place in a corporation of an earlier generation on a single factory floor. But Marx notes that co-operation is not limited to existing in the dominant form it has in any given period. It is a general form taking on a different character as modes of production change.¹⁴

Can one end all oppression by economic change? We talked earlier about changing a society's economic system to save the society. Is there an economic change that will sweep the society clean of drug addiction, fanaticism, racism, and honor killing? In searching for a remedy to oppression, we cannot focus exclusively on doing away with economic features such as poverty, imperialism, the unlimited pursuit of wealth, and economically induced global warming. Without a doubt, an economy of a given kind can both perpetuate oppression and affect the form it will have. For example, nineteenth-century English employers kept the wages of English workers lower by using low-wage immigrant Irish workers to compete with English workers for jobs. Yet the resulting lower wages rested on national antipathies that were already present. Marx says that the English worker feels himself a member of a ruling nation and so turns himself into a tool of the English ruling classes against Ireland. The English worker cannot join with the Irish worker against lower wages since the former "feels national and religious antipathies" toward the

13. Marx, *Capital* Volume 1, *MECW* 35, chap. 1, §4, footnote 92.

14. *Ibid.*, chap. 13, 330–32.

Irish worker.¹⁵ This perpetuates national oppression, giving it an exploitative form, without creating it.

Likewise, the capitalist economy intensifies the oppression of those in poor nations by producing global warming. Oppression there goes back to colonial conquests and carries forward through the extraction of wealth by multinational corporations. Now, the unrestrained race for profits that characterizes capitalism is damaging nature through its reliance on burning hydrocarbons to fuel that race.¹⁶ While rich nations burn hydrocarbons, many poor nations are suffering from inadequate supplies of water for drinking and agriculture. The nations producing the gases responsible for warming ignore the appeals of those nations, who in the near future will suffer the most. This intensifies the oppression of those poor nations rather than creating it.

What then is the task of socialists? They need to recognize the tension involved in socialists' confronting oppression. Capitalist exploitation is an obstacle to a viable society and this is what traditionally troubled socialists about it. There is a tension between moving directly against exploitation and possibly diluting this task by also moving against oppression. Overcoming this tension would be virtually impossible if dealing with exploitation and oppression were unconnected tasks. It would be like a nation on one continent, after starting to fight a war on a second continent, deciding to fight a war on yet a third continent. But hope of removing the tension comes from a connection between exploitation and oppression

Exploitation has an effect on oppression that provides the crucial connection. Exploitation shapes the form oppression will take in a capitalist society. We just saw how racial oppression had to change its form with an economic change; it had to change its form from one adapted to slavery to one adapted to wage labor. This change did not take place without the resistance of slave holders. But it proved possible for racism to adapt itself to the capitalist mode of production. This adaptation rewarded capitalists while leaving white racist workers with their sense of racial superiority.

In order to reduce oppression drastically, one must look for an economic alternative to capitalism to which oppressors would find it difficult to adapt. This is where liberals and socialists differ, since liberals ignore the need to go beyond capitalism to end oppression. The market within capitalism supposedly does not discriminate, but the profit motive in capitalism discriminates since it leads to lower wages for the oppressed, which in turn lowers wages for the rest. Lacking a profit system, socialism makes it more difficult for oppression to adapt to it. There is nothing gained in a socialist economy by

15. Marx, "The General Council to the Federal Council of Romance Switzerland," *MECW* 21, 88.

16. John Bellamy Foster, "Why Ecological Revolution?," *Monthly Review* 61.8 (January 2010): 1–18.

setting workers against one another or by setting firms in one country against those in another.

The socialist economy would run best not when there is hostility between racial, gender, and national groups but when there is cooperation between them. By denying the use of exploitation to defend oppression, socialism can draw those opposed to exploitation and those opposed to oppression together. Even if it is difficult for oppression to adapt to socialism, what is to keep oppressors from uniting to defeat socialism? To avoid perpetuating oppression in this way, we have to rely on the affinity between the exploited and the oppressed, which we shall now discuss.

4. Affinity and Autonomy

What would a struggle for socialism be like? One of its important aspects will be breadth. The socialist struggle will take on the range of projects of those involved in narrower struggles. Despite the irreducibility of oppression to exploitation, a struggle for socialism must be broad enough to include struggles against both.

Those who fight against exploitation and those who fight against oppression often go separate ways, even though there is a large overlap between the working class, which is exploited, and, for example, blacks and women, and immigrants, who are oppressed. However, they can act together based on parallels in the structures of their struggles. Each of these groups is fighting against a powerful group's taking advantage of it, and in doing so each fights in its way for making a more viable society. This common structure is not just a unity of convenience, one in which groups join to help one another reach unrelated goals. It is a genuine unity, one deriving from each group's fighting for a viable society by fighting against its own subordination. Capitalism will fight to block the realization of this unity by pitting white against colored, Hispanic against black, and male against female through different wages and legal status. But alone, each group's struggle will be in jeopardy.

Where there is a common structure of the above kind, there can be what Max Weber called an "elective affinity" between the groups.¹⁷ The root idea is that in view of some commonality the groups elect to recognize one another as potential collaborators. The elective affinity between groups fighting exploitation and those fighting oppression depends on the common goal of overcoming threats to society coming from divisions in it. (Those among

17. Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. T. Parsons (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), chap. 3, pp. 91–92. Weber's concept of "elective affinity" (*Wahlverwandschaft*) is interpreted in the way I use it by Michael Löwy, *Redemption and Utopia: Jewish Libertarian Thought in Central Europe: A Study in Elective Affinity*, trans. H. Heaney (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992), 8–13.

the oppressed who are of the capitalist class will have the same affinity. But they cannot make that affinity a basis for electing to act with those struggling against exploitation. They do not elect for solidarity with the exploited due to their class ties.) The oppressed link social justice with expanding freedom and equality, understood not as pure liberalism does but more as laid out by Rawls.¹⁸ This enables the oppressed and exploited to come together under a banner of “social justice.” But they also recognize that what draws them to social justice is their common fidelity to society.

I shall speak of a *socialist movement* in a way that recognizes the importance of elective affinity. Those in a socialist movement want an alternative to capitalism. They may want this alternative either because they are wage workers who make this their main goal or because they adopt this goal through elective affinity even though their main goal is ending oppression. Those whose main goal is ending oppression may themselves be wage workers. In many countries, women equal in number the men who depend for their livelihood on a wage. National and racial minorities complain that they suffer higher rates of unemployment than dominant groups. Males from indigenous communities leave their communities to become workers in rich countries. Admittedly, wage work does not extend to some housewives, peasants, informal workers, residents in a ghetto, or self-employed workers. Still there is a trend for more and more of the oppressed to become wage workers in the capitalist system. This facilitates the growth of affinity between the oppressed and the exploited. Even when the oppressed are not wage workers, they have occasion to recognize the affinity through the experiences of those who are wage workers and through their own encounters with finance and distribution under capitalism. It makes sense to conclude that there is an elective affinity between the oppressed and the exploited. An elective affinity also exists between environmental activists and workers victimized by the many ways corporations destroy their living and working conditions.

We need to avoid trying to derive too much from the elective affinity between groups. First, having elective affinity does not mean that the exploited and the oppressed are united in a common struggle. It means they have a reason to unite to overcome their different kinds of subordination. Indeed, we have seen movement in the direction of unity and away from identity politics. Unions have come to include as a matter of principle practices supporting the oppressed, and many of the oppressed are supporters of labor rights since they are also wage workers. Second, threats to unity are also present within both the exploited and the oppressed. Workers don't agree about whether there should be repressive measures against undocumented immigrants, and women don't agree on the issue of abortion. However, with opposition to

subordination as a common ground, it is feasible to attempt common actions prior to resolving all these divisions.

While keeping in mind these two limitations, we can say that elective affinity allows for a broadening of the concept of working class. In urban areas the trend is for the oppressed to work for a wage to live, while in rural areas the trend is to flee to the cities in search of work as small plots no longer serve to make a living. Since so many of the oppressed either now or will soon need to work for a wage to live, the majority of the oppressed could reasonably elect for affinity with the exploited. Thus, we have a basis for treating the working class itself as not just the exploited but also the oppressed who are not actually capitalists. This does not mean that a socialist movement will ever gain adherence from all of the working class in this broader sense. But a socialist movement, in the broad sense I gave it above, will not be successful without strong support from this broad working class. Henceforward, I shall refer to this broad working class, simply as the working class.

5. State and Socialism

I repeat that socialism is a means; the end is to secure social viability. This doesn't distinguish it from capitalism, which prides itself on being the way to hold society together. But, this commonality does not imply that socialists accept the same political institutions as capitalists. Socialists, I argue, must have a state, but one in which power comes from below. And they must have a party, but one that is not an instrument for winning elections and ruling but for clarifying issues and advocating positions concerning change. Ultimately, these requirements have their justification in the failures of both capitalist and Soviet-style institutions.

Marx held that one could not build a state compatible with socialism without destroying existing state power. The socialist movement must dismantle those features of the capitalist state engaged in limiting democracy, preferentially serving the wealthy, stimulating poverty, and underfunding public goods like education and housing. The effects of these features penetrate the entire state structure, leaving no alternative but to dismantle it.

In Venezuela under Hugo Chávez, the vacillating nature of support for farmer cooperatives, for communal councils, and for worker committees is widely attributed to the continued support for capitalism within both the government ministries and significant segments of the society. At this point the state there is left-leaning but not socialist. It has attempted with mixed success to promote co-management between state managers and factory committees, between state funding sources and co-operatives on idle land, and between entrenched local governments and communal councils based on direct

18. Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, §11, pp. 60–65

democracy.¹⁹ The result is at best sporadic progress. So, where taking state power is possible, it will happen along with building a new state on a new foundation. As a movement of the great majority, it would be possible in some cases for the socialist movement to use an electoral victory to start building a new state.²⁰ One needs a new state since it has to serve the society and not primarily a single class in it.

Why stop with doing away with existing state power; why not go on to do away with the state? Doing away with the capitalist state does not imply a stateless society, and certainly Marx's talk of destroying existing state power does not imply it.²¹ There are a number of reasons for having a socialist state. Revolutions must be prepared to defend themselves against external and internal attack. In speaking of the French Commune of 1870, Marx said, "This New Commune . . . breaks the modern State power. . . . The Communal Constitution would have restored to the social body all the forces hitherto absorbed by the State parasite."²² How can the Commune both break state power and restore its forces? The restored forces here are the legitimate functions of a society that would be wrested from the institutions of the non-socialist state and become functions of institutions of a socialist state. Defense is one of those functions, and Marx thought a socialist society could realize it without a standing army. The question is not whether a socialist society should try to defend itself, but what kind of institution is best for doing so. How should it constitute a defensive force and what are the limits on its use? A military force that would be unnecessary to protect a genuine socialist order would raise suspicions that state power is serving itself rather than a socialist society. Thus people use the expression "state socialism" in discussing events like Nikita Khrushchev's sending tanks into Budapest in 1956 to crush a revolution and Fidel Castro's arrest of 75 dissidents for peaceful activity in 2003.

Defense is not the only common good that a state must ensure. Education, transportation, water, courts of law, health care, and housing are obvious candidates. One must have a state to ensure the adequacy and dependability of the means—the public goods—to supply these common goods. Marx refers to these public goods among others under the heading of things that serve

19. Iain Bruce, *The Real Venezuela: Making Socialism in the Twenty-first Century* (London: Pluto Press, 2008), 62–63, 157–58, 179–83.

20. Karl Marx, "On the Hague Congress, Sept. 8, 1872," *MECW* 23, 254–56; and Marx, "Letter to Hyndman, Dec. 8, 1880," *MECW* 46, 49–50. Marx's comments in these documents provide a basis for saying that, though he thought a non-electoral revolution possible, he was reluctant to say it would necessarily come about.

21. Karl Marx, *The Civil War in France*, *MECW* 22, Part 3, 332–33.

22. *Ibid.*, 333–34.

"the common satisfaction of needs, such as schools, health services, etc."²³ The neoliberal privatization of public goods constructed to realize these common goods represents a desperate effort of capitalism to turn new spheres of human activity into capital as older spheres fail to generate increasing enrichment for capitalists. While an overarching state must assure the adequacy and dependability of public goods, their construction and maintenance could rely on local units of the state, such as communal councils.

In addition to guaranteeing public goods, a socialist society needs to coordinate the different units within the society. Only a central political body can perform this function. It will coordinate finance with production, ensure that the production of goods and services is satisfying needs, set priorities among public goods in view of the scarcity of resources for them, and intervene to protect the structures of direct democracy.

Just as supervision in socialist production serves the supervised, so too socialist political power embodied in the state serves its citizens rather than a class. This requires, as discussed below, building the state on direct rather than representative democracy. Forces with some promise of creating such a state have emerged at various times in the past century. But they faced formidable opponents and a major long-term victory has thus far eluded them. Is this a reason to declare that the project is utopian? I set two requirements in section 2 for a socialist project's being non-utopian. One is contributing to social viability and the other is favorable circumstances for its execution. Being favorable did not mean being immediately available for realizing a project. It is enough if the present circumstances have a reasonable potential for leading to circumstances that support realizing the project.

A state in which power comes from below is not possible where capitalism thrives. One condition for it is an inversion of the relation in capitalism between workers and those who organize their work. In socialism, supervisors and managers help carry out the collective decisions workers make in a given workplace or in a network of workplaces by helping them coordinate their individual efforts. But distinct workplaces must coordinate their efforts with one another. In this broader task, supervisors and managers will also be helpful, this time in countering the tendency of workers to focus on the issues of their own workplace and to engage in destructive competition with other workplaces. We are not talking here about commands but guidance workers have requested but are free to reject. This contrasts with orders from supervisors carrying out the decisions of managers who in turn are responsible to boards made up of a few of the society's elite. It inverts the relation under capitalism, where supervisors and managers fashion their orders to satisfy the capitalist class rather than the society. Those orders are for strict obedience, promoting divisions, threats of lay-offs or closure, speed-up, and the

23. Karl Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Program*, *MECW* 24, Part 1, 85.

like. Thus, the supervisor or manager and the worker are antithetical figures in capitalism, but need not be in socialism.²⁴

This inversion provides a starting point for talking about the legislative and executive parts of a socialist state. I begin by commenting on the differences between capitalist and socialist citizenship. In capitalism, you work, not as a citizen of a state, but as contracted with a boss. The distinction loses its sharpness in a socialist society. In socialism, the control workers exercise over production and other social activity fulfills part of their responsibility as citizens for running the socialist state. Otherwise, some other group could substitute for workers in running a state designed to serve all citizens. But any other group would have an agenda with narrower interests, whereas in socialism everyone will work in a context in which work is never just for an individual or a group without being for the society.

The legislative aspect of the state begins where worker and communal assemblies discuss and vote on issues that are local, regional, and society-wide. Without discussion and voting at the lowest level, we do not have rule from below but at best a system of voting for persons rather than issues. The alternative that socialism offers to voter manipulation by narrow interests is direct democracy. It begins at the workplace and community levels from which delegates communicate the positions taken there to a higher level, at least they will do so when those positions would also apply to other communities or workplaces.

Local levels shall have executive powers sufficient to ensure meaningful local autonomy. There will be a need for departments or ministries at each level in order to implement legislative decisions. To keep executives from ignoring the people's wishes, the head of each department or ministry at a given level will be a delegate elected to a legislative body at the same level.²⁵

6. Party and Unity

Why is there a need for political parties? Shouldn't a variety of social movements suffice? Movements often focus on single issues and ignore the need for reaching a balance on various issues. They tend to ignore how their treatment of a single issue affects other issues. A political party takes responsibility for addressing many issues and hence for developing an approach that balances the treatments of the various issues. Within movements, the press of activity makes it difficult to pause in order to consider how to connect issues in a unified program. Social movements are important for throwing a light on neglected issues. But even when movements focusing on different issues form alliances, they have difficulty working out a common plan and remain merely

24. Marx, *Capital* Volume 3, MECW 37, chap. 23, pp. 381–84; and *Capital* Volume 1, MECW 35, chap. 13, pp. 335–38.

25. Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, MECW 11, Part 2, 116–17.

supporters of each other's actions. A party goes beyond a single issue to advance a systematic view of issues that a society will grapple with to determine whether it protects its viability.

Another reason for having a party is the need for a strong advocate to increase support for the socialist project. A movement can attract some advocates by exemplary action, but others through an account by a party of what the movement is about. A socialist party can provide a systematic way of attracting groups and individuals to a struggle for socialism. It can articulate the reasons why those in disparate movements would benefit from viewing their causes within a common anti-capitalist framework. Such a party can attract to the socialist movement those concerned with the environment, gender issues, issues of people of color, and imperialism by appealing to the affinity of their causes with that of overcoming exploitation. Moreover, it can make clear that, since the overwhelming majority of those in these movements have to sell their labor to live, they stand to benefit from the change in work relations socialism would bring.

A socialist party's advocacy can change not just individual citizens and movements but also institutions of the socialist state. Though a party is not an instrument of enforcement, its views offer guidance on issues of laws and state action. The state, as noted in section 5, includes popular bodies—communal councils, workers councils, and councils of cooperatives and the mechanisms for delegating people in these popular bodies to higher levels. In shaping its position on issues, the party must come before the citizens to discuss the stands it takes and the issues it prioritizes. Though a party is an advocate of certain positions, it leaves the state—including the popular bodies—to decide whether or not to adopt those positions.

These important roles that parties play are compatible with having multiple parties. Prior to reaching socialism, the existence of multiple socialist parties can bring more people to support the socialist project. Marx and Engels took note of this potential of multiple parties when they said, "The immediate aim of the Communists is the same as that of all the other proletarian parties: formation of the proletariat into a class, overthrow of the bourgeois supremacy, conquest of political power by the proletariat."²⁶ Also, multiple parties provide a useful competition to help eliminate programs for reaching socialism that do not fit the circumstances. When several parties remain strong after such competition, they can negotiate a common position as a basis for action that will move then closer to socialism. Moreover once socialism

26. *The Communist Manifesto*, MECW 6, Part 2, 498. Caution is in order since, for Marx, "party" here means a political tendency that a movement might adopt and that might become part of a coalition with other tendencies. See Hal Draper, *Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution*, vol. 1: *State and Bureaucracy* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1977), 153n, 332n.

comes, there is no reason to make multiple socialist parties illegal. Multiple views of how best to balance the various demands arising within a society can help avoid mistakes that would threaten the society. Having multiples views will also broaden acceptance of socialism.

An issue as sensitive as multiple socialist parties is the status of non-socialist parties. The demands of democracy trump the case against such parties. Not to allow them would call for creating agencies of suppression that would eventually choke of debate even among socialist parties. Of course, a democratic state would be free to act against parties that are in the hands of foreign counter-revolutionaries or are organizing an insurrection against it.

Marx's tolerance for non-socialist movements is apparent in his discussions of co-operatives. In 1867, Marx said the International Working Men's Association should favor spontaneous movements of the working classes but should not "dictate or impose any doctrinaire system whatever."²⁷ In particular, he urged the Association to acknowledge the co-operative movement as showing that "the association of free and equal producers" can supersede the subordination of labor by capital even while falling short of bringing socialism. He objected in 1875 to the German Democratic Party's making as a main demand of its program one for "the establishment of producers' co-operative societies *with state aid under the democratic control of the toiling people*."²⁸ Not making it a main demand, still allowed him to hold that co-operatives could play a transitional role toward socialism.

The poor record in the twentieth century of leftist parties has done a lot to convince leftists to avoid them. But this bad experience represents only a beginning, a beginning from which we on the left have already learned important cautionary lessons. We have learned to spot danger-signs. Prominent among them is a party leader's conviction that saving the revolution he or she has helped make avoids the world historical defeat of socialism. If indeed the circumstances are unfavorable for saving the revolution, then making the effort to save it will eventually defeat it from within. Its failure at a given time will not keep a socialist movement from recurring under favorable circumstances.

7. The Socialist Economy

It is time to discuss production and distribution in a socialist society. A guideline for discussing them is that a socialist economy must contribute to avoiding social collapse rather than focusing on growth. Not being careful in fashioning distribution and production can lead to social collapse. We end up either with an economy that fails to provide the material requirements for social life or with one that reintroduces forms of inequality and exploitation

27. Marx, "Instructions for the Delegates of the Provisional General Council," *MECW* 20, 190.

28. Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Program*, *MECW* 24, Part 3, 93.

reminiscent of capitalism. (I focus on requirements for a socialist economy, neglecting thereby Marx's description and critique of the capitalist economy.)

In facing the challenge of fashioning a socialist economy, one starts from the idea that, in doing away with capitalist property, production will be "concentrated in the hands of the associated individuals (*der assoziierten Individuen*)."²⁹ Concentrating production in their hands does not mean that the associated individuals come to adopt a comprehensive economic plan. Here associated individuals are ones who use their capacities as assets in the cooperative task of producing in a way that ensures a viable society. Concentrating production in their hands then means encompassing all production in one cooperative undertaking. The associated individuals enter into tasks the society needs. But whether it is plumbing, banking, or teaching, these tasks complement one another and must then be undertaken cooperatively. Small local enterprises seem adequate for many essential tasks, whereas other tasks call for large enterprises. What about remuneration, whether through social benefits or cash, for working at these tasks? It must cover important needs to ensure that people do not have to limit their cooperation in order to work competitively for their own interests. Moreover, standards for remuneration would aim at preventing harmful divisions from arising and as well at encouraging entry into new or neglected tasks. Though some of what is involved in putting production in the hands of the associated producers involves regulation, none of it involves a comprehensive plan for the economy. Instead, putting production in their hands suggests their being alert, from the level of work committees on up to ministries, to signs of unmet needs for products or services.

Why won't competition be vital for a healthy socialism? It can reduce waste and promote innovation. But competition under capitalism is highly wasteful; it decreases the time for obsolescence, kills millions in wars to get resources and markets, uses funds to finance cannibalizing competitors, and generates the extremes of poverty and wealth. Perhaps by doing away with the use of production for private gain, we could allow competition without such a waste of human and natural resources. We need to be aware, though, that competition has other effects that might offset these gains in efficiency. If socialist enterprises were to compete in markets, they could remain internally co-operative enterprises while externally competing with one another for sales of their products and services.³⁰

There are several possibilities to consider. The first is to try to avoid crossing the line to capitalism by claiming that gain to co-operatives is not private gain. But in reality these co-operatives would be for-profit enterprises

29. Marx and Engels *Communist Manifesto*, *MECW* 6, Part 2, 505.

30. Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Program*, *MECW* 24, Part 1, 85; Part 3, 93–94.

keeping enough of their profit to grow faster, to command greater market shares, and to put members a notch ahead of others.

This possibility raises the question of social unity because of two effects that competition has on for-profit co-operatives. One effect is that competition suspends co-operative relations between co-operatives by orienting the use of their members' capacities toward their enterprise's benefit rather than toward that of all. At best, this competition hurts some co-operatives to increase the aggregate benefit of all. The other effect is that members of a co-operative end up exploiting themselves in order to try to defeat competitors. The co-operative's leaders appeal to its members to work harder so it can beat out its competitors. By working harder, the enterprise is better able to guarantee a decent living for its members and make a more persuasive case to the banks for funds needed for expansion. In this way, the members not only exploit themselves but diminish internal democracy by letting their leaders' guide them toward competition and growth. However, the aim of struggling for socialism is not to create new divisions that threaten society but to give the exploited and oppressed the opportunity to become a "universal class"—and hence not a class at all. Its universality comes from the class's acting for the society and not just for itself.³¹

Fortunately, one can avoid these undesirable consequences through a second possibility for competition among co-operatives. Without seeking profit for themselves, co-operatives could compete through a market in the way some not-for-profits compete with one another within capitalism. They would compete for clients through quality of service or product. They could acquire the funds for expansion based on the social need for their product or service. This would serve as a test for expansion through borrowing whether for new production or for buying up existing enterprises.

This implies that, on this second alternative, any profits enterprises make would be social assets, meaning that these assets would not be available directly to the enterprises making the profits. Instead, profits would go into a bank until bodies with power to allocate funds make their decisions. (These allocative bodies would derive their membership ultimately from enterprise committees and community councils.) They will base their decisions on judgments about where investing the funds will help strengthen the society. This would reduce efforts by enterprises to exploit themselves in order to grow or take over other enterprises.³²

31. Marx, *Capital*, vol. 3, *MECW* 37, chap. 27, p. 438. Marx says here that co-operatives "naturally reproduce . . . all the shortcomings of the prevailing system" but are still "transitional forms from the capitalist mode of production to the associated one."

32. In discussing "directly associated labor," Marx employs as an analogy "the patriarchal industries of the peasant family" in *Capital*, vol. 1, *MECW* 35, chap.

Admittedly, there will still be a tendency for co-operatives to compete for investment funds by making a good showing before the allocative bodies. Increasing production and efficiency at an enterprise will make more profit, thus giving those in charge of allocation a reason to provide such an enterprise with funds for expansion.³³ Still where profits are social assets, the main incentives to work are restricted to the need individuals have to support a decent life for themselves and to the need they have to support society. Capitalism has helped occlude the need to support society by trying to replace it with a need to outdo others.

I find this second possibility acceptable. The concession it makes to the market is a modest one, since it is a market in which the profit motive does not aim at private gain—the gain of an individual or of the many groups in society—but primarily at social benefit. It looks even more modest when we consider that public goods will occupy an even larger part of a socialist economy than they do of the current capitalist economy. This is because socialists find that many of the threats to society under capitalism arise from the small number and poor quality of its public goods.

Public goods, as I use the term, are not goods we seek on a daily basis, but they are the systems or enterprises producing goods we all have a regular need for. What kind of product or service does a public good make available? It is a product that each of us wants for everyone, including oneself. So by participation with others in creating a public good, one hopes to secure its benefits for anyone who needs them.

Socialists are ready to point to areas ignored or being privatized by capitalist societies where having public goods are essential for avoiding threats to society.³⁴ Among the areas requiring public goods are housing, food, education, justice, transport, and health. The promise of a public good to deliver a certain benefit to anyone in a society who needs it will require a public implementation and enforcement. Beyond needing citizens with concern for one another and laws laying out regulations for distribution, a modern society implements public goods by taxation and enforces them with oversight.

1, §4, pp. 88–89. He treats the peasant family as consuming the product it produces except for the capital goods it renews. This is like a modern co-operative with its "directly associated labor" except that the modern co-operative will depend on selling part of its product to survive.

33. Michael Lebowitz, *Build it Now: Socialism for the Twenty-first Century* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2006), chap. 6. For Marx on for-profit co-operatives, see "Instructions for Delegates, February 20, 1867," *MECW* 20, 190.

34. See also, Marx and Engels, "Address to the Central Committee of the Communist League, March 1850," *MECW* 10, 286.

The main difference between enterprises that are public goods and enterprises that are not is that the former make their services or products available to all in response to the widespread desire that everyone who needs them should get them. What is available to all has no market value since, if one gives it a price, someone else will undercut that price by giving it a lower price until the price finally drops to zero. Despite this, a public good, since it provides services and products, will need a source of financial support. People chip in with their taxes to provide it. Neoliberals within capitalism promote the idea that a public good should be a set of one or more for-profit enterprises. The result is rarely greater efficiency and commonly a failure to cover everyone. The same objection does not apply in socialism where one or more enterprises, other than state enterprises, might undertake the delivery of the benefits of a public good. In this case, the enterprises are not-for-profits. The society entrusts them with the task of getting services or products to people in a manner that realizes the aim of public goods.

It will be difficult to allocate funds among public goods in a way that protects society. This difficulty exists for both socialism and capitalism. However, under capitalism, allocation favors those public goods that depend on major purchases from the private sector. Military defense depends on major purchases from industries. The budgets for education, though, focus on personnel. Under socialism, allocation among public goods takes place in a different context, one in which the enterprises are not-for-profit and the allocators are selected from a system of direct democracy. It is more likely, then, that the allocation of funds among common goods will protect the society.

8. Socialism and the United States

In the US, a socialist movement seems more distant than ever despite deteriorating conditions in the society. Wages have been stagnant, debt fills the gap, and businesses move to cheap labor. The economy comes to depend on the sale of unredeemable debt rather than on increasing production. Social democratic remedies are dead on arrival in legislatures. Immigrants lose basic services as retribution for lowering wages and taking jobs. Religious fundamentalism flourishes on the insecurity created by the crumbling of gender and racial hierarchies. With fear abounding, people look for reassurance in causes bankrolled by the superrich. They look for ways to undercut others to save themselves.

There are though some bright spots. The labor movement showed signs of awakening from its torpor when legislatures in many states, including Wisconsin, Ohio, and Indiana, mounted campaigns to destroy it. The fight for survival forced labor leaders to turn to solidarity and away from the insular view that only the local union mattered. Even before this recent jolt, rank-and-file groups, such as Teamsters for a Democratic Union, were fighting for union

democracy. This is a key demand since socialism will depend on democracy that begins at the base. The early embrace by many US unions of the Occupy movement in 2011 was also a positive sign of a broadened view of solidarity.

But is it feasible to go from struggles for solidarity and democracy among workers to demanding an alternative to capitalism? If Michael Moore's film, *Capitalism: A Love Story*, could raise the issue of socialism before large and approving audiences, rank-and-file groups could follow up with actions that challenge capitalist institutions. We already have an anti-capitalist agenda that on paper the AFL-CIO voted to support. It calls for ending the capitalist health insurance industry.

Alongside rank-and-file labor groups, there are social justice, human rights, anti-discrimination, and environmental groups that continue to spread awareness of abuses and to attempt reforms. Capitalism has no easy time meeting the demands of such groups. For it, low wages protect the inequality in wealth and power it demands. Unequal educational opportunity safeguards class division. Denying human rights in crowded prisons is less expensive for the for-profits running them. As long as it can last, the devastation of nature will allow the unlimited pursuit of profit. The groups that spread awareness of these abuses are part of the transition to a socialist movement since they recognize the capitalist context of the abuses they wish to remedy.

But, will their identifying capitalism as problematic lead them to want socialist change? They will remind themselves that socialist revolutions have been failures leading to bloodshed, impoverishment, and/or dictatorship. But think back earlier to the false starts before capitalism settled in. By the sixteenth century, feudalism had won back any gains made against it by the republicanism of Italian city-states that dated from as early as the end of the eleventh century. A decisive victory against feudalism in Europe had to wait until Bonaparte drove feudalism's armies from the field across Europe to the East. Expect capitalism to hold on as tenaciously as feudalism did. In 1852 Marx wrote, "Proletarian revolutions . . . criticize themselves constantly, interrupting themselves constantly in their own course . . . deride with unmerciful thoroughness the inadequacies, weaknesses and paltriness of their first attempts, seem to throw down their adversary only in order that he may draw new strength from the earth and rise again."³⁵ The lessons from these "lost causes" will show us what to discard and what to embrace.

Socialists in the US can also take advantage of international developments. One of them is the new socialist movements around the world. No decade goes by without a strong movement—in some sense socialist—emerging. Now Venezuela and Bolivia have movements among their lower classes alongside governments opposed to the neoliberal capitalism promoted by the US. Within these countries debates go on over the nature of socialism.

35. *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, MECW 11, Part 1, 106–07.

Defining the relation of state power to their movements becomes the occasion for ongoing internal struggles. For fear of spreading revolution in Latin America, the US is cautious about how it intervenes in Venezuela and Bolivia. Revolutions elsewhere have always played an important role for US socialists. Their existence testifies to the vulnerability of the capitalist system and to the non-utopian nature of socialism today. Another international development to take advantage of is the growing intensity of the North/South conflict. I am referring to conflicts between these regions over medicines and intellectual property rights generally, economic development and cheap labor, extraction of natural resources, and reparations for damage done by climate change. Behind these conflicts is a conflict over capitalism. They are conflicts between the multinational pharmaceutical companies of the North and people of the South who cannot afford their drugs, between multinational corporations and the cheap labor in their plants and mines, between production for export and the need for balanced development; and between the rich nations' use of carbon fuels and the water shortages in poor nations. Many of those in the US trying to resolve these conflicts do so to relieve suffering, but long-term success at this depends on a diagnosis of the North/South conflict in class terms. Making this diagnosis would be an important step in the process of building a US socialist movement. University Students against Sweatshops is making this step, as exemplified by its victory over the sportswear manufacturer Russell who it forced to respect labor rights in one of its Honduran plants. Another example is the cross-border work of unions like the United Electrical Workers in Mexico and the Steelworkers Union in Spain, Mexico, and Africa.

These developments, at the national and the international levels, are encouraging non-utopian responses to capitalism today. — • —