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Author(s): Robert A. Gorman

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MICHAEL HARRINGTON'S PROPOSALS FOR DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISM IN THE UNITED STATES

Robert A. Gorman

We dream and the dreams of a bad night are given to us as philosophy. You will say that I too am a dreamer; I admit this, but I do what the others fail to do. I give my dreams, and leave the reader to discover whether there is anything in them which may prove useful to those who are awake.

— Jean-Jacques Rousseau

MICHAEL HARRINGTON WAS America's preeminent reader of socialist dreams. He carried these dreams from coast to coast, through urban and rural landscapes, into small villages, coal towns, the farm belt, and polluted mega-cities. He explained these dreams on television and radio, in newspapers and journals, and in seventeen published books. He created national organizations in which dreams became reality, in which democratic socialism became a real possibility to civic-minded workers and intellectuals. He worked hard and remained optimistic, but he never cracked America's compulsive anti-socialism, even when conditions deteriorated in the 1970s and 1980s. When Harrington died in 1989, for the general public he was still the best-kept secret in town.

Harrington himself, of course, must shoulder some of the blame. He came of age as a socialist more than two decades too late, long after he foolishly jilted embittered, young leftists at Port Huron and fractured what might have become a powerful union of workers and students.¹ This essay highlights what, in effect, became Harrington's proposals for a new, hopeful vision of socialism that might allow democratic socialists in the U.S. to

Robert A. Gorman is Professor of Political Science at the University of Tennessee.

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take part in the public debate on their nation's future. First, I will describe how both socialism and capitalism became lost in history; then I will examine how Harrington proposed to rescue and revitalize socialism by attaching its rediscovered ethics onto America's public culture. Civil society, for Harrington, is bound to government, economics, and culture. Democratic civil institutions can flourish only when people are equal. When they are not, even procedurally democratic civil institutions only reinforce injustice.

THE DEATH OF SOCIALISM

Confronting his imminent death from cancer and the sick state of socialism in 1989, Harrington wondered why a theory that explained capitalism so well was such a failure.² His response also clarified why a lifetime project of explaining democratic socialism had fizzled.

First, socialists were terribly imprecise about what "socializing" the economy actually meant and how it could be accomplished. Communism's theory of centralized management became, by default, the left's designated alternative to "business as usual."

Second, U.S. workers had divided into competing sectors based on skill, gender, religion, race, and region, each with a bureaucracy and a vested interest in staying independent. Workers once had united into what Harrington considered the most important mass movement in Western history. Harrington conceded, however, that, in 1989, proletarian unity was a distant memory. He sadly noted, "The united, revolutionary working class which would act as History's right arm for the creation of socialism did not, and does not, exist."³ This fact helped destroy the identity and appeal of socialism.

Third, socialists never explained what lies between capitalism and socialism. What were revolutionaries to do with capitalist structures? Capitalism no longer consisted of just mass production in private factories. Corporations now specialized in a variety of complex functions, including investment, technological innovation, pricing, and distribution, as well as manufacturing. Salaried managers had replaced owners as key decision-makers, and industrial production was often so dependent on government policies that the line between public and private was fuzzy. How could workers just "take it over"? What would replace capitalism's

free market? Workers were not prepared or willing to seize power suddenly. What would the transition period between old and new regimes look like? Socialists in the past chose to reform rather than transform capitalism, and the system was unexpectedly strengthened. Thus, Harrington asked, "How does a political movement make basic change gradually when at the same time it must observe the constraints of the system it seeks to transform?"⁴

Finally, socialists were completely unprepared for the post-World War II globalization of politics and economics. After finally mobilizing against colonialism, socialists discovered the old enemy very much alive in the worldwide free market. Neocolonialism was a conundrum for socialists. They wanted to end the exploitation of poor lands, but they were too confused and afraid to act. Already searching for an identity and an agenda inside of their own nations, socialists could not design a program for the entire world, particularly since this would have demanded sacrifices from powerful domestic players and a temporary dip in workers' living standards. Socialist governments were thus handcuffed by the unfair rules of a capitalist world system.

These rules affected politics at home as well as abroad. Socialism required a growing economy, but capitalist investment was impossible without the cooperation of international financiers and traders who blocked demand-side, deficit-producing domestic programs. When French socialist Jacques Mitterand had to choose between cutting his expensive reforms or losing needed imports, investment capital, and markets, he decided that France would do better economically without socialism.⁵ Even left-wing workers were hard-pressed to disagree.

Harrington did not reiterate statist programs and strategies which had not worked anyway. Socialism, instead, had to renew its diversity and complexity, "the various and conflicting ways that the movement tried to give specific meaning to its profound and imprecise demand for democratic socialization."⁶ Old forms of socialism, reconsidered, might provide insights into socialism's new dilemmas and also generate a moral consensus to stoke the fading embers of proletarian idealism. Harrington's last works depict how one version of socialism, now discredited, triumphs over others. Since global capitalism is now different from what it

once was, forgotten social theories are again fashionable. Perhaps yesterday's placebo could be today's panacea.

Harrington's winter pilgrimage into socialist history began with a reconsideration of nineteenth-century utopians Claude Henri de Saint Simon, Charles Fourier, Robert Owen, and Louis Blanc, who substituted an ethical community for the liberal state and transformed raw competition into a harmonious union of equal citizens.⁷ Utopian socialism was clearly communitarian, moral, feminist, and activist, but it also presumed that morality determined behavior and that ethical decisions alone could move capitalist mountains. It simply ignored the class struggle and proletarian politics. Karl Marx's and Friedrich Engels's scathing critiques immediately transformed utopian socialism into a noble mistake, and its communalism — the ethical harmony that must precede democratic socialism — was unceremoniously dumped.

Marx subsequently buried ethical socialism by democratizing the idea of utopia.⁸ Whereas utopians depended on artisans, intellectuals, and policy-makers to initiate and administer socialism, Marx's socialism rose like steam from the boiling anger of the workers. The revolutionary process, moreover, was not necessarily violent. Marx and Engels suggested that reformism, at least in liberal democracies, was a powerful weapon.⁹ As workers formed unions and unions became working-class parties, the masses became an unbeatable electoral force that transformed the state, in Marx's famous words, into "the proletariat organized as a ruling class." In short, there was a democratic route to utopianism. The nascent working class and trade union movements could turn utopian idealism into political power, redesigning socialism for its passage into modernity. Legally and nonviolently, workers seized and centralized power before establishing the decentralized, stateless communities that all socialists — scientific and utopian — coveted.

Marx had mistakenly suggested that centralized tactics could create decentralized communities. Nonetheless, Harrington argued that, in key respects, Marx remained a utopian because he wanted to transform society, not merely abolish the state. Marx also envisioned a "kingdom of freedom" where redundant work disappeared and creativity flourished, where goods were distributed based on need, not profit or performance. In the third vol-

ume of *Capital*, Marx equates “socialized man” with “associated producers,” the phrase French utopians applied to worker-managed enterprises. Harrington concluded that Marx personally supported utopian socialist morality, even though his critique did quite the opposite.

Marx hedged on several important issues. How, for example, could a parliamentary system, whose genius was incrementalism and consensus-building, legislate utopian programs? Which measures could transform the state into an instrument of socialization, and which would be absorbed into the system? What role would race, gender, age, and religion play if socialism was defined only in class terms? And how could socialism be both an objective science and an ethical theory? Marx refused to engage this last issue philosophically. When Karl Kautsky and Vladimir Lenin decided that Marx was primarily a scientist, all the other questions magically disappeared, and Marxism became messianic. Proletarian scientists became communist prophets who decreed that socialization meant state ownership of industry. Marxism was transformed into a Party dictatorship that was neither socialist nor capitalist and was committed only to staying in power and pumping the economy. “It was not just that the utopian vision was lost in the process,” Harrington remarked; “so was Marx’s lifelong stress on utopian values such as decentralism, cooperation, and above all, women and men creating the new society as an act of human freedom.”¹⁰

Germany’s Social Democrats adopted Kautsky’s “either-or” formula: either capitalism or, when history has run its course, socialism. Harrington called them “passive revolutionaries,”¹¹ timidly awaiting capitalism’s inevitable collapse while conservatives filled the political void. In power after the First World War, Social Democrats formulated Keynesian transitional programs that used parliamentary reforms to humanize capitalism and became legitimate players in Germany’s capitalist system. When German capitalists nearly expired during the depression, however, they had no remedies and no real idea what socialism meant or how, other than waiting, to create it. Social Democracy had unwittingly civilized capitalism in the name of a doctrine it did not even understand.

At the end of World War II, socialism was a two-pronged scam. On the left was Lenin’s vanguard party, running a factory society

with capitalist technology and rules. Third-World socialists imitated this model to rationalize the brutalities of post-colonialist industrialization.¹² On the right, Social Democracy complacently awaited a socialism that lay somewhere to the left of reality. Its ethics were naive and implicit, and it lacked a transitional strategy. The ethical principles of genuine socialism, as well as the political savvy to get past capitalism, were buried with Marx and the Utopians. Frustrated Social Democrats decided to play a liberal democratic game that workers could not win. Harrington called this “pragmatic utopianism,” that is, socialists actually believing that “a democratic political order could dominate an undemocratic economic order.”¹³ Today, neo-liberals proudly reinvent the pragmatic utopian wheel. The decentered left became its own worst enemy by failing either to dislodge Western capitalism or to establish socialism in the Third World.

THE IMPENDING DEATH OF CAPITALISM

Conservatives blame Social Democracy and its welfare state for capitalism’s recent economic troubles.¹⁴ Harrington agreed that the welfare state had outlived its usefulness but also maintained that it had not caused capitalism to stagnate. He challenged conservatives by reformulating the crisis of modern capitalism.¹⁵

Until the 1880s, Harrington argued, *laissez-faire* capitalism suffered from periodic crises of over- and under-production, recessions, depressions, panics, and inflations. Production was small-scale, flexible, and governed by market forces. More efficient and productive forms of factory technology and corporate organization were introduced by the turn of the century, when large concentrations of workers used huge machines that made standardized products. Dramatic production increases aggravated the economic cycles, which became harsher and more expensive.

Mass production requires mass consumption. Henry Ford had responded by modifying the free market without altering productive relationships. He raised workers’ salaries, financed their new automobiles, and gave them small roles in factory decision-making. In return, though, workers had to obey a moral code that prohibited gambling, drinking, atheism, and wanton self-indulgence. Antonio Gramsci later commented that Ford’s programmed capitalism was a new epoch in history that used high wages

and different cultural and consumption patterns to regulate the market.

As consumption rose, so did production and worker morale, and Ford accomplished all of this without union or government interference. When the depression hit in 1929, the New Deal, with union support, nationalized Fordism by starting public programs that created jobs and stimulated consumption. In Europe, these same reforms convinced economists like John Maynard Keynes to revise capitalist theory. The new social structure of accumulation used public benefits and high union wages to create a market for mass production. Proletarian living conditions improved dramatically, and the rise in corporate profits was far greater than the growth in welfare spending. This wave of prosperity crested after World War II and lasted until the early 1970s. Social democracy and the welfare state had rescued Western capitalism from its most severe crisis.

Economic success, however, created new problems. As manufacturers competed for consumer discretionary income by diversifying, the Keynesian system broke down. Its single-purpose machines and standard batches of mass production soon turned into flexible technology based on computers, automation, and robots. Profitable factories bought micro-electronic manufacturing processes that quickly instigated the development and production of new products. The assembly line's time-consuming model changes were replaced by computer-assisted programs that responded immediately to technical innovations and market conditions.

The high wages of unionized workers made it difficult for corporations to finance the transition to automated plants. Corporate debt rose to the point at which it threatened profits, and unions were attacked for inhibiting industrial flexibility. Industries that mass-produced standard items traveled to the non-unionized South and then to less-developed regions where land and labor were cheap. High-tech, profitable industries that used programmed automation to manufacture a wide variety of specialty items remained in the U.S., but these industries needed fewer skilled workers to handle the sophisticated machinery. Unions no longer were needed by well-paid workers in automated factories, and unions did not exist where they were most needed. The nation, as a whole, shifted from goods to service production,

where low-paying, unskilled jobs were plentiful. Blue-collar factory workers no longer made up such a large percentage of the workforce, while the percentage of non-unionized service workers increased dramatically. A diminishing sector of skilled and white-collar workers as well as professionals gainfully represented traditional middle-class values, but they could not compensate for the sharp reductions in aggregate consumer demand.

Global capitalism's new technical and occupational structure, with fewer desirable jobs available for a growing number of workers, generated chronic unemployment and poverty, even for many of the unskilled workers who were lucky enough to find work. Conversely, a small but growing number of millionaires took larger bites of the nation's wealth and income. The costs of public safety-net programs spiraled up at the moment when the middle-class tax base was disappearing. Government, however, was still responsible for stimulating private profit and paying the rising social costs of those profits. Something had to give.

Public revenues could not keep up with the expanding list of needy entitlement recipients. Interest rates remained high because financial markets were affected by the burgeoning supply-side benefits. The over-valued U.S. dollar increased imports and worsened unemployment in the beleaguered manufacturing sector. Marginally profitable businesses collapsed, and foreign investors supplied capital that would have otherwise gone to more impoverished regions. America's economic fate was determined by others. President Reagan's version of trickle-down, *laissez-faire* economics promoted inequality, poverty, and unemployment at home and helped reduce the markets for American goods abroad. It also imperiled the social wage that had stoked Keynesian prosperity for over forty years.

Bankrupt governments cannibalized their social programs. Austerity struck the most vulnerable, marginalized people, inflaming the crisis by cutting consumer demand for everything but unaffordable social services. The Republican Party shrewdly associated its economic program with popular appeals to family, work, neighborhood, nation, and the joys of "positive thinking," effectively precluding meaningful electoral protest. Image, not substance, triumphed in the 1984 and 1988 elections. Reagan's so-called recovery, however, proved that even economic upturns contributed to the general malaise.

Modern capitalism had subverted its internal market, and economists feared that increased public spending and lower taxes would merely inflate the economy by increasing the mounting public debt. With supply-side economics already discredited, politicians were motionless in the economic quicksand. Entrepreneurs searched for new markets, further internationalizing the economy. As local corporations turned into multi-national corporations (MNCs) and as finance became globalized, national governments no longer effectively regulated corporations and banks. A kind of international economic anarchy existed within the advanced nations as well as between the advanced nations and the Third World. Bad loans, unwise investments, and shady deals propelled the world economic system to the edge of financial collapse. Economic policy was out of public control.

Capitalism's welfare state was based on growth, not redistribution. When the economy soured, public officials manufactured canards that placated an overtaxed middle class and also disunited the impoverished. Government officials, accenting the bureaucratic rather than the therapeutic nature of welfare programs, suggested that welfare benefits were enjoyed by people who did not deserve them. Welfare, they claimed, fragmented and depersonalized recipients, producing a dependent, lazy underclass. The need to remedy these evils far outweighed any help the poor and the sick may have received, or any reforms that may have improved the system by empowering local communities.

A disproportionately high percentage of welfare recipients, though not a majority, were nonwhites. By attacking welfare, politicians scored points with poor whites, whose fear and anger otherwise might threaten the rich. Racism was not a solution, but it kept poor workers busy fighting each other, and it also won elections. More recently, religion-sponsored terrorism has accomplished the same effect on a global scale. Harrington believed that capitalism's crisis is structural rather than episodic, and that it concedes too much — rather than too little — to the private sector. Any tactic that reinforces the priority of corporate interests in economic decision-making only worsens an already bad situation.

The welfare state had become too socialist to let capitalism work and too capitalist to permit socialism. Reagan's free-market

cure proved worse than the disease. Behind the populist rhetoric of its so-called “revolution,” conservatism sanctioned an unfair distribution of wealth. It wanted an old-fashioned future that was already outmoded, but with communism dying and democratic socialism fast asleep, no alternatives existed. Capitalism thus experienced a “slow 1929”:¹⁶ a non-dramatic, non-cataclysmic structural crisis with frightening consequences.

SOCIALISM REBORN

When the home team wins, people celebrate; no one thinks about the kitchen sinks filled with dirty dishes or the unpaid bills lingering in desk drawers. Flushed with victory over a communist empire that was disintegrating, Americans ignored Harrington’s sobering message. Capitalism, he argued, was collapsing at home the way communism was collapsing abroad, and the welfare state was experiencing a crisis like none before. Harrington was not vindicated because, although *laissez-faire* economics had failed, bigotry replaced progress, and socialism dissolved in the hopeless welfare state.

Life was certainly changing, so the question was not “if,” but “how.” Would capitalism and its neoliberal vanguard become a corporate dictatorship that only preserved liberal rhetoric? Or would we democratize production and distribution? Harrington’s final project proffered democrats an ideology that explained the current crisis and pointed to a just future. Capitalists believed in their system and knew how it worked. Socialism, for Harrington, needed to be redesigned because working people also needed something to believe in, something that would improve their lives. Marx realized this, and so had the utopians. Now Harrington wanted to spread the word.

Harrington’s final books — *The Next Left* (1986), *The Long-Distance Runner: An Autobiography* (1989), and *Socialism: Past and Future* (1989) — outline a “New Socialism” that ties nineteenth-century utopian ethics to Marx’s politics. By recovering a forgotten path, Harrington’s “New Socialism” buries the modern left’s meager values and its welfare-state mentality. Harrington felt it was a radically new kind of radicalism that could appeal to those in the ideological center, somewhere between the boardrooms and the barricades. He believed that Americans need a new sense

of purpose in their everyday affairs, a purpose which sanctions a beloved heritage and also helps them live better lives.

Conservatives already claimed to “own” the future, in Owen Harries’s words, to “determine the spirit of the age, the prevailing notions concerning what is possible, inevitable, desirable, permissible, and unspeakable.”¹⁷ Ronald Reagan did his part by using myths to consolidate the new conservative consensus in the 1980s. As historian Harvey Kaye notes in *The Powers of the Past*, Reagan emphasized the virtues of “small-town America” and trumpeted traditional values such as self-control, self-reliance, national pride, weak government, and the free market. His speeches referred to the Pilgrims, Thomas Paine, Abraham Lincoln, the Founding Fathers, Franklin D. Roosevelt, John F. Kennedy, and other American heroes.¹⁸ He personalized his stories and related them to popular national sentiments, amiably reinforcing the notion that people became poor because of their own shortcomings: They were unmotivated, lazy, dishonest, and stupid. Reagan revitalized and perpetuated the “American dream” that anyone can succeed if only s/he tries hard enough and has only her/himself to blame if s/he does not succeed. Ronald Reagan distorted, harnessed, and manipulated the nation’s cultural heritage for political gain.

The President and Congress cut Medicaid, prenatal and child health programs, and funds for community health centers; slashed over \$2 billion from Aid to Families with Dependent Children; depleted child nutrition programs in 1981, day care programs in 1982, and food stamp programs in 1983; eliminated job training and employment programs under the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA); and added “workfare” to welfare eligibility rather than providing jobs. Surveying the wrecked lives of poor people, including some Reaganites, sociologist Ruth Sidel concluded in 1986 that the sophisticated use of tradition and mythology was “perhaps Mr. Reagan’s most significant and most pernicious accomplishment.”¹⁹

Harrington conceded the civil, ideological, and cultural aspects of capital’s successful class war from above. Conservatives had indeed represented the past in such a way as to reinforce the social order and power structure and mollify subaltern classes, but Harrington also challenged socialists to learn from the enemy, to embrace public culture — once contemptuously called

the *superstructure* — in order to promote democracy and end inequality. Capitalism had a new class system that was dense and diverse, with yawning cultural gaps separating workers. Economics alone could no longer catalyze social change, because workers were not aligned on class issues. Although these “dealigned” workers on balance would do better economically if they cooperated rather than competed,²⁰ they needed a powerful emotional bond.

Each thread in Harrington’s ethical net represents one part of a new morality, a new world view. Woven together, these parts mix culturally diverse workers into the common project of fighting capitalist hegemony in every sphere of life. The New Socialist morality, Harrington warned, was neither an ethical utopia nor a religion, but it would encourage people to create a world with more options for personal growth than ever before existed.²¹ Socialism, he believed, would rise from below as people adjusted to their expanded freedoms.

Civilized societies have traditionally used abstractions to justify elitism. In the Middle Ages, for example, the idea of an organic community established by God empowered landed aristocrats. Enlightenment individualism and its natural laws elevated capitalists into a new hegemonic elite; and communism recaptured the medieval sense of community but reduced everything to matter, and then justified a barbaric dictatorship. Throughout history, truth always unravels into domination, and social obedience becomes a moral absolute. Democratic socialism’s fate, on the other hand, indicates that social movements without principles are insubstantial. Critique alone pads resumé and creates media gurus, but it does not mobilize the kind of widespread support needed to change a culture.

The problem of philosophically anchoring emancipatory social theory has always vexed thoughtful radicals.²² Harrington’s solution was to frame the New Socialism in “values rooted in programs that actually change the conditions of life.”²³ This “practical idealism” was critical and flexible, non-dogmatically challenging the status quo. When different programs were shown to produce better living conditions, the values also changed. Harrington’s practical idealism was thus actualized in the give-and-take of democratic decision making and empirical inquiry. This idealism was ethically and tactfully justifiable, something demo-

crats could believe in and also use to establish an electoral majority.

The actual substance of Harrington's New Socialism is an ancient principle that has inspired democrats and revolutionaries throughout history but that never had been operationalized. Harrington believed that it answered the perennial question of how to reconcile the needs of a just community with the needs of free individuals by resurrecting the republican ideal of the citizen, wherein public and private interests would be harmonized. Republican government would be the common business (*res publica*) of citizens, a business which they would transact for the common good. Citizens would be free, self-governing, and virtuous enough to place the public's welfare above selfish interests.

Classical republican values originate in Ancient Greece and ricochet through the Roman Empire, the late Middle Ages, and the French, American, and Russian Revolutions. Each historical epoch articulates one moment of the original public-private totality: universal harmony, individual rights, or social commitment. The dialecticians, particularly Marx and the utopians, tried to piece together history's broken unity, but they lacked the proper resources to sanction the synthesis. Productive capacity will not satisfy individual needs or finance vital social services, so competition, not harmony, works best. Since public institutions allow rival interests to check one another, the wealthy can also procedurally block republican initiatives which threaten property rights.

Modernity finally enabled democrats to reclaim their republican legacy. New technologies dramatically increased material production. Liberals, especially in England and the U.S., discovered a social conscience, and Western Marxists condemned communism and coveted individual liberty. After its spin through history, republicanism landed in this fertile material and philosophical milieu. The reborn republican ethic of growing and prospering with, not against, others was reinforced by advanced productivity and a mature democratic tradition. An ethical, multi-class, and decentralized socialism — what Gramsci called a “new historical bloc” — could now succeed capitalism and communism. Its popularity in nations, moreover, would create a new sense of world citizenship. International solidarity, like republicanism, offered practical solutions to immediate problems and,

in Harrington's words, strengthened "that oneness of humankind celebrated in the biblical account of the common parents of all human beings."²⁴ A real synthesis of individualism and collectivism was now possible, and Harrington called it "Socialist Republicanism."²⁵

America has its own republican tradition that goes back to Thomas Jefferson. This tradition has surfaced sporadically in domestic struggles for freedom and equality. Politics will decide if this radical tradition of citizenship as a moral value and a basic commitment ever becomes more than what Harrington called "nostalgic rhetoric."²⁶ Harrington believed, however, that U.S. public life had disintegrated into isolated, disconnected, self-absorbed individuals and groups. Democratic socialism, not liberalism, resembled those "little republics" that Jefferson once said guaranteed liberty. It was part of the nation's ethical conscience, that non-elitist, democratic mentality that Harrington characterized as a "particularly American spirit."²⁷ The Left needed to reclaim this republican sentiment, which had sadly been kidnaped and abused by conservatives and neo-liberals. "I do not think that the Left can afford to leave the civic emotions to the Right," Harrison warned. "In a profound sense, that is our heritage more than theirs."²⁸

Socialist republicanism was progressive and indigenous, with roots in traditional American values. By reflecting the collective interests of a free, united people and advocating popular participation in civic affairs, it was profoundly patriotic. Jefferson would have called it the rock-solid foundation of U.S. democracy, and Gramsci would have called it the basis of a democratic historical bloc. For Harrington, however, it Americanized socialism and socialized America.

A NEW SOCIALIST POLITICS

Harrington's New Socialism represented a national morality that would enable diverse workers and interests finally to coalesce. This process, for Harrington, would be "the work of an historic epoch,"²⁹ not of a year or a decade, and socialists would have to harness slowly the painful global transformations that already are underway. Democratic reforms develop their own momentum, altering what people believe and how they act. Praxis creates theory and reinforces democratic politics. "The transition

to socialism," Harrington wrote, "would be much more protracted and profound than most socialists, including Marx, had thought."³⁰

Harrington's New Socialism was, then, a way of living, not an economic doctrine; a quality of life rather than production; a process instead of a concept. For Harrington, socialism was neither a formula nor a legal mode of ownership, but "a principle of empowering people at the base, which can animate a whole range of measures, some of which we do not even yet imagine."³¹ Socialism *is* democracy. Any measure that democratizes the system is socialist for Harrington, even if the system privatizes production.

High-wage, full employment was always the heart of Harrington's domestic agenda, as it is the material prerequisite for democracy. Decent, federally guaranteed jobs for every citizen, paying approximately double today's minimum wage, would drive up wages in the private sector and increase productivity and efficiency. The loss of marginal jobs from the market could easily be outweighed by expanding social consumption. America's decrepit infrastructure, moreover, could be rebuilt by thoughtfully expanding public sector investment. A public rail system, for instance, could create jobs, save energy, and reduce automobile pollution. Harrington proposed a way to solve the housing crisis and also create jobs by subsidizing interest rates on loans for public or private low- and middle-income housing, allowing market rates to prevail for investment in expensive housing, capping the deductibility of mortgage interest, and increasing public housing funds. He wanted to raise morale by reducing the work week to thirty or thirty-five hours, thereby also increasing the number of workers by about twenty percent. Salaries need not fluctuate if a portion of the resulting wage increase was in added leisure time rather than money and another portion in progressive tax reductions. The total would reach forty paid hours with a small fraction publicly subsidized, because increased productivity and reduced unemployment would represent a social saving. Since fixed labor costs (such as payroll taxes, health benefits, etc.) would rise, Harrington proposed abolishing or reducing payroll taxes by funding these programs through general revenues and creating a national health care system.³²

Harrington felt that if each reform was part of an integrated, long-range plan, then economic growth would not suffer. Employee-related expenses, for example, could be publicly financed by revising the tax code, repealing every Republican-sponsored tax cut that did not create jobs and income for poor people, and accelerating targeted military budget cuts. Public assistance going to the elderly, to children, and to safety-net social programs like health insurance, AIDS research, and childcare services were adequately fundable only when full employment resources “economically and politically permit such decency.”³³ Aside from a national welfare minimum indexed to median income, Harrington wanted to re-institute the welfare program that preceded the drastic cuts made during the Clinton and Bush administrations. “Workfare,” he claimed, will fail if jobs that offer medical benefits and day care — and jobs which pay significantly more than AFDC and food stamps — are unavailable. As things now stand, “workfare” just shuttles poor people from welfare to impoverished work. Harrington’s socialism aimed to create a humane *and* efficient system of production, not a charity.

In Harrington’s opinion, “[t]he most hallowed populist principle of American society” — progressive taxation — “must be embraced” to finance economic justice equitably.³⁴ America’s tax burden shifted dramatically during the 1980s (and even more so during the 1990s and 2000s) from the rich to the middle class and poor. Harrington placed the tax burden issue back on the political hotplate but warned against redistributing the tax burden through either wages or payroll taxes since, in a private economy, such increases create employment disincentives. France’s socialist government, for example, nearly went broke when mandated wage hikes depleted private accumulation and investment. Harrington also wanted to cap mortgage interest deductions on median-priced houses, to extend the social security tax to all income, to end the hiring disincentives at lower wage scales by exempting the first \$4000 of earnings from the social security tax, to tax capital gains on inherited stock and large inheritances, to regulate inherited voting rights in private enterprises, and to raise taxes on annual incomes exceeding \$200,000. These policies hopefully would not antagonize capitalists, and they might even earn some business support by financing justice

for workers in an economy that, in the short run, would remain capitalist.

Socialism, however, was now much more than the mere raising and redistribution of money and the creation of jobs. Quality was as important as quantity, and by the mid-1980s, Harrington's original full employment program became, in his words, "qualitatively defined full employment."³⁵ New jobs had to be meaningful, challenging, and, wherever possible, engaged with labor-saving technology. So-called "smart machines," Harrington claimed, would work better if smart people, laboring creatively, ran them — which may happen if new technology is organized in small-scale, cooperative settings. Laborers need fulfilling work, not just more jobs; the economy's character, as well as its size, needs to be upgraded. This ambitious goal became the precondition for meaningful democratic reforms.

Private corporations investing in useful research and development needed to be rewarded with tax benefits. Federal and state agencies, financed by public debt that would be paid off like any other long-term investment, also would need to create high-quality public employment. The nation would have to revamp its public schools to produce skilled, motivated, and ambitious workers, and citizens would need to prepare to use an expanding block of leisure time creatively. Some wage increases could take the form of sabbaticals, annual leaves for job-related study, which would improve quality of life and raise productivity. These kinds of expanding opportunities for personal growth would perhaps accomplish for workers what the post-World War II G.I. Bill accomplished for veterans.

In the late 1980s, workers expended the equivalent of an additional month of paid labor each year more than they were expending two decades earlier; however, for many, the extra hours merely slowed a free fall into poverty.³⁶ They worked more hours, earned fewer adjusted dollars, and lost valuable leisure time. Once Harrington would have magnified pertinent economic factors, such as shrinking salaries and benefits, inflation, de-industrialization, de-unionization, and the need for two-income families. His New Socialism instead emphasized the crisis of time faced by middle-class and poor families, the fact that love alone could not keep them together. Parents worked so many long hours that they rarely had the time or energy just to be par-

ents. Simple pleasures, like shared vacations, rapidly disappeared from family routines. Conservatives aggravated the crisis but nonetheless used it to their own advantage. Harrington wanted socialists to steal the Right's pro-family thunder by actually delivering on promises to help working households; radicalism often burns inside cherished traditions.

Leisure time has become a quality-of-life issue that plays in middle America and will not go away. Sophisticated twenty-first-century technology could reduce the orbit of necessary labor to less than one-half of a worker's waking hours. In the past, people identified with the work they did. Presently, this is not the case with most people. So, what would our new identities under socialism become? Would we watch electronic spectacles or create the future? With its traditional hierarchies and bottom-line mentality, capitalism keeps us glued to our televisions. Socialists need to suggest a range of new possibilities for using leisure hours creatively. Harrington always favored expanding and improving public education to accommodate every qualified citizen, regardless of wealth. He realized that "sending more and more people to college in a society which does not create enough jobs requiring college education can be destructive to individuals and wasteful of resources."³⁷ The U.S. needs better schools and universities, but it also needs physical investments in theaters, athletic fields, fix-it shops, and libraries, as well as increased public support for music, art, poetry, crafts, hobbies, and participatory sports.

If America is to compete successfully in the world market, Harrington knew that justice must enhance, not inhibit, efficiency.³⁸ On a sinking ship, empowered workers merely supervise their own descent; thus, cultural enrichment would be meaningless without a robust national economy, which requires a combination of national initiatives to coordinate and to streamline productivity and local initiatives to democratize the workplace. Harrington's two-pronged strategy was intended to increase the number of quality jobs, to promote economic growth, and to foster republicanism. Economic democracy could be a popular platform for mobilizing insecure voters. U.S. economic and political benefits, moreover, would influence voters and politicians in industrialized nations, where worker-friendly policies are already popular.

Command economies are obviously inefficient and unjust. So are market systems in which investments enrich only the wealthy. Harrington favored a national industrial policy to subsidize basic industries that had economic and social value and to uphold global ecological agreements. Local communities, with federal subsidies, could hire experts to negotiate the specifics. Harrington also wanted to establish a national investment bank to raise capital in financial markets with federally guaranteed loans. He hoped that unions would eagerly invest pension funds in this kind of guaranteed, no-risk outlet and benefit from its activities. The bank would be legally mandated to invest only in ecologically sound projects that developed technology, productivity, and jobs — especially in areas where the rate of return discouraged private investment. Harrington added, “It would not be in the business of underwriting corporate takeovers, greenmail, golden parachutes, or any other ingenious device of the paper entrepreneurs.”³⁹

The nation’s economic plan framed local investment and production policies. Harrington still believed that genuine worker and community participation in making these basic decisions, including plant location, would improve morale and increase productivity. Many of his proposals were already on record. With one eye on quality-of-life issues, Harrington also suggested that federal legislation mandate employee involvement in designing factory technology.⁴⁰ He wanted to put teeth into Employee Stock Ownership Programs (ESOPs).⁴¹ Corporations had used ESOPs to qualify for government tax subsidies, but in return, they marginalized workers by making them individual owners of small amounts of stock with almost no power. If ESOPs were restructured to empower workers instead of managers, Harrington believed they would promote democratic economics. Collective profit-sharing arrangements established in Sweden, Holland, and Denmark are models of what ESOPs could become. In these European programs, companies are required to pay a tax in the form of voting stock into a mutual fund controlled by the elected representatives of workers. Thus, the workers actively participate in the decision-making process rather than remain passive stockholders.⁴²

Home-based employment is usually associated with exploitative forms of capitalist production. Harrington, however, felt that

working at home actually saves time and money now spent on commuting and frees workers from the tight discipline of the assembly line or office.⁴³ He also believed that working at home promotes decentralized communities where jobs, shopping, and financial resources would no longer be concentrated far away from residences and schools. All this was possible, however, only if the transition to home work was strictly regulated so that workers would not be left isolated, de-unionized, alienated, and enslaved by their computers. Thoughtfully reformulated, this kind of work might preserve basic union standards and increase freedom, creativity, and flexibility.

Underlying all of Harrington's proposals for democratizing production was the need to strengthen and expand democratic unions. Union membership had steadily dropped since the 1960s until, in 1989, the percentage of unionized workers was at its lowest point since before the Depression. Harrington attributed this to structural changes in the economy and to reactionary politics.

U.S. corporations moved some labor-intensive factories to the South, computerized others, and invested heavily in the service sector. Unions found their traditional blue-collar constituency replaced by unskilled service employees and by educated, well-paid, white-collar workers. Even in the best of times, therefore, unions have suffered, but the last fifty years have not been friendly to unions. Since the Taft-Hartley Act of 1947, workers have found organizing very difficult, and employers have taken full advantage of the permissive legal climate. Management consultants created union-free environments; stunning anti-labor decisions, especially by the Rehnquist Court, impeded labor activities; the National Labor Relations Board grew hostile. In other industrial democracies and in the public sector, unions grew two to three times more quickly than in the workforce as a whole. Harrington asked liberals and socialists to support labor law reform to democratize unions and to facilitate workplace organization.⁴⁴ A strong, cohesive labor movement might decentralize management and redistribute income and wealth while also promoting full employment and a robust economy. Unionization could make economic democracy possible and introduce socialist republicanism into local communities and the workplace.

For Harrington, the question of whether socialists should nationalize production was still unsettled.⁴⁵ If nationalization pro-

moted socialism, it was desirable; if it inhibited workplace democracy, then it was undesirable. Consequently, nationalization was an issue for pragmatic and empirical inquiry.

In Harrington's opinion, essential production that requires large-scale planning and investments — and could not be easily decentralized (such as power grids, transportation systems, and communication networks) — must be nationalized. However, their internal structures, and their impact on the nation and on their communities, needed to be socialized so that workers could make key decisions. If the daily operations of nationalized industries resembled private corporations, then the quality of life would not change. Harrington again suggested that workers and community representatives serve permanently on factory Boards of Directors so that they could influence the national plan.

America would remain a mixed economy dominated by private business for the foreseeable future, especially because the fear of public bureaucracies and centralized production is widespread in the U.S., even among workers. Thus, Harrington urged socialists to create exciting new forms of social ownership that would socialize production without necessarily nationalizing it.

In small-scale, high-tech industries, cooperatives and worker-owned enterprises might work best.⁴⁶ Harrington cited the Swedish experiment in establishing wage-earner funds.⁴⁷ In this experiment, workers negotiated a profit-sharing agreement with management and then invested a percentage of the annual profit in Swedish businesses. The workers also served on the Boards of Directors wherever they invested. Independent units of workers soon controlled corporate decisions. An American version, which Harrington called "collective capital formation,"⁴⁸ could be financed by pension funds or profit-sharing revenue. "Collective capital formation" would not be burdened with the ugly communist legacy often associated with nationalization, and it might even appeal to progressive Democrats. It would survive only if it actually stimulated qualitative economic growth and full employment. If it did not, then even socialists would bail out of the project.

Nationalization, then, is not socialism. Socialism is not necessarily a planned economy, nor is capitalism necessarily a market economy. Harrington once again shocked the Left by suggesting that, in certain conditions, markets actually socialized an econ-

omy.⁴⁹ In equality, markets are a wonderful device for communicating individual desires, but when people are unequal, markets only exaggerate the desires of the wealthy. Since Americans admire the wealthy, socialists need to make markets serve social priorities rather than rich consumers. Woodrow Wilson once said, "The truth is, we are living in a great economic system, which is heartless."⁵⁰ By combining democratic participation with market efficiency, socialism could put "heart" into a bountiful U.S. economy.

Markets can also play an important role in the transition to socialism as long as the demand for resources exceeds supply. In scarcity, socialists need to be as concerned with efficiency as capitalists are.⁵¹ But socialist efficiency expresses social and global goals, not just private interests. Socialists minimize the input of human and material resources in public and private sectors in order to maximize a surplus that can alleviate suffering. In our competitive world market, top-down, Old Left egalitarianism hurts, rather than helps, workers. Taylorism, on the other hand, permits unfair markets to command the economy. Neither planning nor markets are sufficient. Prudently combined, though, each is indispensable. Even in socialism, however, stubbornly inefficient factories must close down, and society must provide job retraining, public works employment, job placement, employer subsidies, moving subsidies, and — as a last resort — unemployment compensation. Workers are human beings, not commodities, even when they are victimized by the labor market.

Informal, decentralized, cooperative efforts are often more efficient than standard bureaucratic procedures, particularly in delivering social services.⁵² Recipients become independent and creative, displacing public officials who do not understand life on the dole. Inventive delivery strategies that minimize costs and maximize services also trim bloated bureaucracies and deliver more "bang" for the public buck. Decentralization, moreover, inspires workers to challenge bureaucratic inefficiencies with new strategies informed by their knowledge of the assembly line and the consumer market. Harrington was certain that decentralized workers would make more and better items for less cost than traditional workers. But this would require a market modified by democratic planning priorities, a market in which workers minimized costs, maximized production, and then shared in the ex-

panded surplus. "That," Harrington said, "leads to what must seem to be a very heretical thought for a socialist: that there must be sources of individual and collective gain in this process."⁵³

Socialist republicans strive for excellence on moral grounds or because excellence is its own reward, but in scarcity, they must also economize inputs and link performance with success. Workers thus need material incentives to maintain a competitive edge. How, asked Harrington, could socialists eliminate greed if workers are selfish?

His answer: "The evidence is ambiguous."⁵⁴ Rising standards of living in the 1960s had purged competition of its worst features. In the 1980s and beyond, though, the nation became more acquisitive and heartless than ever. Economic democracy might collectivize capital within a competitive market so that workers in efficient factories would prosper while those in inefficient enterprises would suffer. Inequality, then, would grow instead of diminish.

Harrington conceded that in scarcity markets reward innovative producers and penalize lazy ones, but in democracies, markets cannot be as sovereign. Socialists have to decide what kinds of markets are appropriate, not whether markets are necessary. Workers' psychological reactions to socialist markets would become policy issues affected by political struggles between forces representing both sides of the question. "Making self-interest — including collective self-interest — the instrument of community purpose will be a contradictory, and even dangerous, idea for the foreseeable future," Harrington wrote. "It is also necessary."⁵⁵ As schools and public services improve, republicanism would spread, and reliable information would replace hucksterism. Harrington felt that consumers would become more intelligent, more rational. Real majority rule would finally prevail in the marketplace the way it does at the ballot box. In such circumstances, the politics of selfishness would evaporate.

Harrington did not agree with "market socialists" for whom market relations define socialism. He believed in markets that could implement democratic priorities, priorities which would limit the anti-social consequences of market rewards and penalties. Socialist market-losers would not suffer unemployment, hunger, inadequate medical care, substandard housing, or shameful educations. Market-winners would not be sovereign. In the New

Socialism, “the heirs of Karl Marx may well vindicate the hopes of Adam Smith.”⁵⁶ If and when scarcity is replaced by abundance, then socialist markets, like those of capitalism, may wither away.

NOTES

1. See Robert A. Gorman, *Michael Harrington — Speaking American* (New York: Routledge, 1995).
2. Michael Harrington, *Socialism: Past and Future* (New York: Arcade, 1989) 19-28.
3. *Socialism* 22.
4. *Socialism* 25.
5. Michael Harrington, “Is There Socialism after France?,” *Taking Sides: The Education of a Militant Mind* (New York: Holt, 1984) 233-48.
6. *Socialism* 28.
7. *Socialism* 29-37.
8. Harrington bases the following argument on Martin Buber’s *Paths in Utopia* (trans. R.F.C. Hull [Boston: Beacon Hill, 1958]). See *Socialism* 37-38.
9. Engels reiterates this point in letters published during the 1890s and in the 1895 Preface to the new edition of Marx’s *Class Struggles in France*.
10. *Socialism* 43.
11. *Socialism* 49.
12. *Socialism* 80-90.
13. *Socialism* 110.
14. For a detailed explanation of the conservative accusations, see *Socialism* 122-26; Harrington, *The Next Left: The History of a Future* (New York: Holt, 1986) 50-69; and Harrington, *Fragments of the Century* (New York: Simon, 1972) 232-43.
15. See *Socialism* 126-28; *Next Left* 13-46, 71-95.
16. Harrington, *Next Left* 16.
17. Owen Harries, “A Primer for Polemicists,” *Commentary* 70.3 (1984): 57. Harries was an American conservative and a Fellow at the Heritage Foundation. He and Norman Podhoretz signaled that conservatives were intent on winning the ideological battle between liberalism and conservatism. Also see Robert Dallek, *Ronald Reagan: The Politics of Symbolism* (Cambridge: MIT P, 1984), especially pp. 1-4, for an analysis of Reagan’s use of myth.
18. Harvey J. Kaye, *The Powers of the Past* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1991) 95.
19. Ruth Sidel, *Women and Children Last* (New York: Viking, 1990) 22.
20. Harrington applies the word “dealigned,” formerly used to describe the party system, to describe workers. See *Socialism* 255-62.
21. *Socialism* 266.
22. See Gorman, *Biographical Dictionary of Neo-Marxism* (Westport: Greenwood, 1985).
23. *Socialism* 272. The phrases following this quote are also found here.
24. *Socialism* 273.
25. *Socialism* 273ff.
26. *Next Left* 190.

27. *Next Left* 190. A reaction to the Hartzian thesis regarding the liberal quality of America has recently formed around the republicans Bernard Bailyn, J.G.A. Pocock, and Gordon Wood.
28. *Next Left* 191. See also Harrington, "A Socialist's Centennial," *The New Republic* 192.28-29 (1985): 16-18.
29. *Socialism* 150.
30. *Socialism* 253.
31. *Socialism* 196-97.
32. Michael Harrington, "If There Is a Recession — and If Not," *Dissent* 32.2 (1985): 142. See also Harrington, "The First Steps — and a Few Beyond," *Dissent* 32.2 (1985): 53ff.; *Next Left* 167-73.
33. Michael Harrington, "Progressive Economics for 1988," *Nation* 03 May 1986: 617. See also "The First Steps" 47-57.
34. "The First Steps" 46; see also *Next Left* 164ff.
35. "The First Steps" 50. See also *Next Left* 144; "If There Is a Recession" 139-44; and Marion Long, "Paradise Tossed — Visions of Utopia," *Omni* Apr. 1988: 103.
36. See Juliet B. Schor, *The Overworked American* (New York: Basic, 1992). See also Harrington, *Socialism* 215-16.
37. Unpublished letter from Harrington to John Simmons, 09 Feb. 1979, Tamiment Library, New York U, DSA Collection, Michael Harrington Correspondence.
38. Harrington, "Towards a New Socialism," *Dissent* 36.2 (1989): 153-63.
39. "The First Steps" 49; see also *Socialism* 201. Harrington called investment to create only profit "casino capitalism."
40. *Next Left* 155-56.
41. "The First Steps" 52.
42. Harrington, "Private Profit and the Public Good," unpublished essay, 1980, Tamiment Library, New York U, DSA Collection, Michael Harrington Correspondence.
43. *Next Left* 150ff.; *Socialism* 203.
44. "The First Steps" 52.
45. "The First Steps" 196ff.
46. "The First Steps" 201-02.
47. "The First Steps" 200.
48. "The First Steps" 210-11.
49. "The First Steps" 218-34; Harrington, "Markets and Plans," *Dissent* 36.1 (1989): 56-70. See also Harrington, *Decade of Decision: The Crisis of the American System* (New York: Simon, 1980) 188.
50. Qtd. in Lewis Lapham, *Money and Class in America* (New York: Ballantine, 1988) 42.
51. Harrington, *Socialism* 239; "Markets and Plans" 66.
52. *Socialism* 240ff.; "Markets and Plans" 67ff.
53. *Socialism* 243.
54. "Markets and Plans" 68.
55. "Markets and Plans" 68. See also *Socialism* 246-47; "What Socialists Would Do in America," *Taking Sides* 217.
56. *Socialism* 219.