



## Moving Beyond Capitalism: Human Development and Protagonistic Planned Socialism

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*ABSTRACT:* Major transformations of existing social orders require a broad belief: it is possible to build a viable alternative that addresses the major problems of the existing society. Social discussions involving a multitude of “mid-level concrete” models, or “previsions,” of such a viable alternative combine with the existing social discontent to create such social beliefs. The broad concept of “socialism” designates an organization of society and its production that does not involve some group of people living off their appropriation of part of the production of the rest of society. This paper presents some of the elements of a prefigurative conceptualization called Protagonistic Planned Socialism, which belongs to the Democratic Planned Socialism family of models. Its central elements are protagonististic collective self-determination of the operation of all the institutions of society by its members, consciously socially planned social production, and social labor processes that support and promote human development.

*KEYWORDS:* socialism, models of socialism, prefigurative socialism, democratic planned socialism, protagonististic planned socialism, moving beyond capitalism

### I. MOVING BEYOND CAPITALISM

**T**HE POINT OF DEPARTURE for this work, which will be taken as a premise, is that an ever-growing fraction of those who live in the capitalist world-system are becoming more and more convinced that their social system is unacceptable and needs to be changed. From the important levels of discontent during the two

decades after World War II in both the First and Third Worlds, it has grown over the last 50 years, but especially, and at an accelerated rate, since the global Great Recession of 2009.

A fundamental division exists among these advocates of change. On one side are those who believe that the safest and best way to improve the existing capitalist world-system is through reforming the system's performance in the ways they are concerned with, without changing its basic nature. On the other side are those who believe that acceptable alleviation of, for example, gross inequalities of wealth and power, and massive environmental destruction, can only be achieved by changing the fundamental nature of the system — by “moving beyond capitalism.” This paper is concerned with this second position.

To propose that society move beyond capitalism immediately poses the question: what should replace it? The Cheshire Cat's profound response to Alice tersely indicates what is required to answer the question.

[Alice] “Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?”

[Cheshire Cat] “That depends a good deal on where you want to get to.”  
(Carroll, 1865, 57.)

To evaluate the relative desirability of various proposed procedures for the operation of a post-capitalist society, one needs a measuring stick with which to evaluate them. One needs to establish what goals the procedures are intended to promote.

Over the last two centuries socialists have motivated their advocacy by referring to many different goals, which they have argued their proposed alternatives would achieve better than capitalism. Commonly expressed goals in the 19th century included equality, solidarity, liberty,<sup>1</sup> freedom, and emancipation. There were many more even then, including some more concrete goals, such as universal free education, the abolition of industrial child labor, universal healthcare, and various aspects of social security.

By the end of the 20th century, capitalism's operational goal of production for the purpose of expanding capital (roughly, “production for profit”) had initiated massive and rapidly escalating environmental

1 In passing, the strong similarity of these first three should be noted to the motto that came out of, and is now popularly associated with, the non-socialist French Revolution; *liberté, égalité, fraternité*.

destruction. In line with the goals of socialism being determined by humanity's drive to replace the practices of capitalism which harm humanity with non-harmful ones, protecting the environment and ecological sustainability have become a central goal of essentially all models of 21st-century socialism.

Asserting that the four most commonly presented concepts of "general goals" of socialism in the 21st century are equality, solidarity, self-governance, and ecological sustainability, in no way implies that there are not also a plethora of other "more specific and concrete" goals, coming from the many ways capitalism limits and cripples the development of people's potentials. As an example, consider the less discussed goal of "sufficient variety" in all aspects of one's life and the associated goal of "choice" required to exploit these, necessary for people to develop themselves as "richer humans."

I find it useful to think of socialist transformation as having a single goal: supporting and promoting "human development." As always, there are many ways that people can, and the literature does, express a concept such as this. In 1845 Marx and Engels wrote of "'free activity,' which is for the communists the creative manifestation of life arising from the free development of all abilities of the 'whole fellow'" (Marx and Engels, 1976, 225). In 1847 in a precursor to the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, Engels expressed it as "the all-round development of the abilities of all the members of society" (Engels, 1984, 354). Common simpler 20th-century expressions include "the development of one's human potential," "to become more human," or Erich Fromm's "the increasing development of man" (1961, 43).<sup>2</sup> I consider Paulo Freire's slightly longer expression of becoming more fully human a particularly rich way to express humanity's goal: "Man's ontological and historical vocation [is] to become more fully human" (Freire, 1970, 40). It is "historical" — what humanity has pursued as its goal of existence throughout history — and it is "ontological" — pursuing it is the nature of being human.

With human development as the goal of socialism, goals such as equality, solidarity, self-governance, ecological sustainability, and others are thought of as sub-goals. They remain goals, but in this frame they are not simply posited as goals, but rather obtain their status

2 Fromm very richly expanded this statement of the goal of Marx and Engels' socialism in his section "Marx's Concept of Socialism" (Fromm, 1961, 58–69).

as goals through their contribution to human development. This frame of a single goal of human development, with a multitude of sub-goals, is preferable for thinking about the related questions, “what are socialism’s goals?” and “what is socialism?” However, to facilitate communication, and for simplicity, I will refer to socialism’s sub-goals simply as goals of socialism.

## II. ENVISIONING SOCIALISM: BETWEEN SCYLLA AND CHARYBDIS

The spur for humanity’s “ontological and historical vocation to become more fully human” has always been discontent with some aspects of existing social institutions and/or practices. The desire to alter these practices inherently leads to (many different) envisionings<sup>3</sup> of societies without them. But for people to act on their discontent, a “sufficiently broad social belief” in a viable option for a differently organized society is required. It was already understood 150 years ago that the daily operation of capitalism undermines the development of this necessary belief:

The advance of capitalist production develops a working class, which by education, tradition, habit, looks upon the conditions of that mode of production as self-evident laws of Nature. The organization of the capitalist process of production, once fully developed, breaks down all resistance. (Marx, 1996, 726.)

A discussion throughout society of the many possible viable alternatives to capitalism is a necessary part of creating the social consciousness without which “moving beyond capitalism” is impossible.

At the same time, the goals of socialism discussed above (human development, and specifically self-determination) require that the many different possible future socialisms created by humanity be determined by the people who will live in those systems. Detailed ready-made systems presented as optimal blueprints or recipes would,

3 Throughout this article the gerund “envisioning” will be used both with its more common meaning of the action of the verb “to envision,” as in the heading of this section, and with its much less often used secondary meaning of the result of the action of envisioning, as it is here.

if merely implemented mechanically as indicated, be violations of these goals of socialism.

Already in 1848 Marx and Engels made this point in relation to the then popular envisionings of Étienne Cabet and Charles Fourier:

Historical action is to yield to their personal inventive action, historically created conditions of emancipation to fantastic ones, and the gradual, spontaneous class organization of the proletariat to an organization of society specially contrived by these inventors. Future history resolves itself, in their eyes, into propaganda and the practical carrying out of their social plans. (1986, 515.)

This leaves attempts to present an envisioning of the result of moving beyond capitalism facing the standard Scylla and Charybdis dilemma. On the one hand, detailed blueprints and prescriptions allow Scylla to devour and obscure the true socialist nature of the alternative: self-determination by self-activating people. On the other hand, failure to present viable and detailed socialist alternatives condemns the project of social transformation to be pulled under into Charybdis' "there is no alternative" whirlpool. Envisioning, then, is necessary if transcending capitalism is to chart its course carefully between these dangers.

My hope is to contribute to the necessarily broad "mid-level envisioning discussion" that both must and will go on as part of humanity's transcendence of capitalism.

### III. PROTAGONISTIC PLANNED SOCIALISM

This section will present a particular socialist envisioning, Protagonist Planned Socialism, which will hereafter be referred to by an acronym, PROPLASO (prō · plā · sō). The procedures presented here to partially characterize it, from among the scores that would be required for a fuller indication, are concerned with some of the issues most discussed and debated today concerning envisioning socialism. It is a major extension of what was originally proposed in Campbell (2002).

This model is a member of a family of models of Democratic Planned Socialism (DPS). In line with the necessity just indicated of models such as PROPLASO being part of a social discussion on building socialism, and also because of length limitations on this essay, many of the presented procedures will give references to how other DPS

models treat the same issue. Most of these will be to positions similar to PROPLASO on the specific issue, where the position is discussed at greater length than possible here. In a few cases, what PROPLASO proposes will be underlined through a contrast to a DPS model that treats the issue differently, in a way I would consider inappropriate for promoting the goals of socialism. There is, however, no intention or space here to debate other DPS models. In line with the length limitation, this referencing will be done using four particular DPS models that will be familiar to readers of *Science & Society* and the three preceding special issues on envisioning socialism (Campbell, 2012; Devine, 2002; Laibman, 1992), which I will collectively refer to as “the DPS-reference models.” Consistent with somewhat standard labeling, I will refer to Devine’s model as “Negotiated Coordination” (NC), Albert and Hahnel’s model as “Participatory Economics” (PARECON), Cockshott and Cottrell’s model as “New Socialism” (NS), and Laibman’s model as “Multilevel Democratic Iterative Coordination” (MDIC). While all the authors have written numerous books and/or articles in which they discuss their models, I will take as representative presentations Devine (1988), Albert and Hahnel (1991), Cockshott and Cottrell (1993), and Laibman (2007; 2015).

The proposed procedures characterizing PROPLASO are grouped into three essential features. These should not be thought of as three “pillars” of the model, as that image suggests components that play similar roles in defining the model. To the contrary, these features are nested; the second feature is one component of the first, and the third feature is part of the second. These three features are protagonistic collective self-governance, socially planned social economic production, and developmental labor.<sup>4</sup> For reasons of space the third feature will not be discussed here.

#### A. *Protagonistic Collective Self-Governance.*

Critics of capitalism have long used the terms “capitalist democracy” or “bourgeois democracy” to refer to the various systems of voting used to allow society to choose between various agents who are trusted by the capitalist minority to govern in its interests. The word “democracy” in the name of the DPS family of models envisions a

4 Labor that in its execution supports and promotes human development.

“socialist democracy,” replacing undemocratic bourgeois democracy with social self-governance.

An important part of all modern visions of socialism is that it will be a classless organization of society. Very closely linked to its understanding of the goal of socialism as human development, PROPLASO puts forward Protagonist Collective Self-Governance (PCS), not as a synonym for socialism itself, but as its heart, the way humans in a socialist society organize and execute their social activity in all spheres of social life. For example, the fundamentally different way from capitalism that PROPLASO organizes and enacts the part of all social activity constituted by social production (often referred to as “economic planning,” which will be discussed below) is an application of PCS to that particular social activity. PCS is PROPLASO’s conception of what is necessary for “socialist democracy.” From among many more, here are four essential aspects of social decision-making that are required for it to be PCS.

*Procedure 1: Protagonism (self-activation) in all human activity.* What people are (both as individuals and as groups), in all the senses of how they act, how they perceive/understand the natural and social worlds, and what they believe in, is strongly influenced by what they experience throughout their lives. From that, the goal of “human development” requires building an environment to promote and support it.

If man draws all his knowledge, sensations, etc., from the world of senses and the experience gained in it, then what has to be done is to arrange the empirical world in such a way that man experiences and becomes accustomed to what is truly human in it and that he becomes aware of himself as a man. (Marx and Engels, 1976, 130–1.)

The limitation of this correct presentation of a necessary central condition for human development is exactly the issue that led to Marx and Engels’ correct one-sided criticism of the “recipes” of the Utopian Socialists. We create good physical and emotional conditions for the lives of our dogs, and even train them to be dogs who develop their potentials to be what we consider “good dogs.” That does not constitute human development.

Two huge steps in the early 1840s by Marx and Engels in developing their vision of human development through transcending capitalism are always (correctly) celebrated — the break with Hegel’s idealism in line with the materialism of Feuerbach, and the determination

of the proletariat as the collective agent of the change. There was a third equally important and nearly simultaneous step which, while certainly not unknown, is indicated much less often: their break with Feuerbach's "mechanical materialism" through their elevated focus on humans as the protagonists of the changes in the systems that shape them, and hence as agents of self-change.

The materialist doctrine that men are products of circumstances and upbringing, and that, therefore, changed men are products of other circumstances and changed upbringing, forgets that it is men who change circumstances. (Marx, 1976, 7.)

The importance to socialism of social procedures being protagonistic is insufficiently stressed and discussed in the presentation of most DPS models. It is definitely implied in all four DPS-reference models. But only Devine's NC stresses the need for "self-activation" in all the practices proposed throughout the presentation of the model. At a deeper theoretical level, Devine also devotes significant space to discussing the importance of self-activation to socialism, particularly in his chapter on "Democracy" (1988, ch. 6).

*Procedure 2: Collective or social self-governance.* The necessity for self-governance to be collective or social rests on understanding the individual not only as the object of socialism's goal of human development, but also as its subject (the agent executing it); humans are "social individuals," as opposed to "isolated individuals" or "Robinson Crusoe individuals."

An important aspect of social self-governance is the difference between its concept of "what it means to make a social decision" and that of capitalist democracy. The bulk of the literature on social decision-making titles this topic "democracy."<sup>5</sup> A term that became popular in the second half of the 20th century to indicate what socialist self-governance required beyond capitalist democracy was "participatory democracy" (Pateman, 1970; Macpherson, 1977, ch. V; Held, 2006, 215). As indicated by its name, its most obvious concern is authentic participation by all members of society in social governance, in contradistinction to the window-dressing participation characteristic of capitalism. A related concern is that social participation not be

5 See Macpherson, 1977, and Held, 2006, on the most important different concepts of democracy from the 1800s forward.



restricted to choosing between predetermined alternatives, but rather that it involves all phases of governance: determining what needs to be decided; deciding; implementing the decisions; and finally evaluating how well the decisions as implemented achieve the goals they were intended to promote.

All four DPS-reference models include socialist democracy. Its importance to Laibman's MDIC is indicated throughout its presentation, starting with its inclusion in the title. Albert and Hahnel's PARECON and Devine's NC both sketch out their proposals for self-governing social decision-making at great length. The extent of the possible differences among advocates of DPS in their ideas on how to concretize shared goals, such as collective self-governance, is underlined by Cockshott and Cottrell's NS (ch. 13). In that Cockshott and Cottrell differ starkly from the other DPS-reference models and PROPLASO on the issue of democracy, this also highlights another aspect of the value of the necessary ongoing envisioning discussion.

*Procedure 3: Discursive democracy.* A further assumption beyond isolated individuals that is built into standard choice theory, which underlies capitalist economic and political theories, is that people's preferences relative to the social issue to be decided are determined prior to the beginning of the social-choice process. In this frame, social decision-making is reduced to discussing various ways of aggregating those pre-formed preferences (generally voting procedures) to give a social preference that is "as consistent as possible" with people's pre-formed individual preferences, subject to some set of properties generally held to be desirable for the aggregating process.<sup>6</sup> However, it is clear from even the most cursory anthropological or sociological considerations of how groups of people make social decisions that, contrary to the assumption that people make decisions based on pre-formed preferences, their decision processes include extensive discussions with other people in their decision-groups. Their preferences on social issues are influenced by the understanding generated by the decision processes themselves, of both what other people prefer, and how other people perceive that the choices made will affect them.

Beginning in the late 20th century, a small literature began to appear on this topic under the names of discursive or deliberative

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6 Arrow's Impossibility Theorem establishes that no aggregation process can always guarantee the social result to be consistent with all the pre-formed individual preferences, subject to the desired constraints; hence the search for procedures that are "as good as possible."

democracy. PROPLASO requires all social decisions to be conducted in this discursive way, which is consistent with the social nature of humans. The detailed nature of the procedure needed to generate a meaningful social discussion will depend on the general complexity of the issue, if specialized training is needed to understand it, and the size of the decision-making group.

The presentations of Devine's NC and Albert and Hahnel's PARECON particularly stress the importance of social discussions prior to social decisions as an essential part of social decision-making.<sup>7</sup>

*Procedure 4: Multilevel social decision-making, demarcations, iterations, and "grassroots" vs "the center."* There are two different reasons why social decision-making must be multilevel in a socialist society.

There are far too many social decisions for any person to discursively participate in deciding them all. Hence people should make social decisions only on whatever "affects them significantly enough." Demarcating who is strongly enough affected to be part of any social decision-making group is itself a social decision. Some decisions by society strongly affect only a small group ("local," or "grassroots"), others various intermediate scales ("regions"), and some clearly the whole society ("national"). A first reason for the necessity of multilevel social decision-making is that an individual's social interests are "strong" on different levels.

The issue of how some determined decision-making group will obtain and discursively process the information it needs from all its members leads to a second reason that multilevel decision-making is necessary. If a group is "large enough" and the issues being determined are "complex enough," it will not be possible for the required social discussion and decision to occur directly by the entire group. A pyramid structure of discussion and decision-making can then be created. The entire membership of the "center"<sup>8</sup> is divided into local groups that are small enough for the necessary collective discussion to occur directly. A representative of each of these grassroots units then continues the necessary discussion of the issue in a higher-level group ("higher" means only "on a larger scale"; there is no implication of importance or power) composed of representatives of other grassroots units, and this group makes a tentative decision. This ascending

7 For a short introduction to deliberative democracy, see Held, 2006, ch. 9.

8 One often equates "center" with "national," but this multilevel procedure likewise holds for any regional decisions relative to its grassroots.

process is repeated until the group of representatives represents the entire original group of decision-makers. That group of representatives definitively or tentatively makes the decision at the level of the center. If society feels it is appropriate — this may well be true in the case of determining production plans, as will be discussed below — this process can be iterated. The center can calculate what each grassroots unit would need to do in order to implement a decision, and propose that to the grassroots. Those units would either accept that proposal or make a counterproposal, in which case these would then pass back up to the center as before. This iterative process could be repeated as often as was decided to be necessary.

The importance for socialist democracy of such multilevel iterative decision-making for addressing some social decisions is stressed in Laibman's MDIC (2007, 150ff).

PROPLASO considers the common oppositional understanding of “the center *vs.* the grassroots,” or “top down *vs.* bottom up,” to be false, and crippling to socialist decision making. Rather, for those decisions whose nature and scale necessarily involve contributing to social decisions at various levels, “the governing insight of the central–decentral conception is that neither level can function successfully without the other” (Laibman, 2007, 150). And as just described, notwithstanding the center's ability to coordinate many things that the local units cannot, this necessary multilevel nature for such social decisions should not be misunderstood as merely “coordination by the center for consistency of actual decisions that are all made in local groups.”<sup>9</sup> Rather, such social decisions must be understood as decisions that require a process that involves the interactions of numerous contributing social decisions that occur at various levels.

### B. *Socially Planned Social Economic Production*

In line with the discussion above, I believe the fundamental question in envisioning a socialist economy to be how to make social decisions consistent with the goals of socialism. Conceptually, how a society will carry out its economic production is “only” an issue of how to apply its social decision-making processes to that question. The fact

9 As in Albert and Hahnel's multilevel PARECON. See also Laibman (2007, 148) for a critique of this very different concept of the role of the different levels in their model.

that historically discussions on envisioning socialism have given economic production such great attention is a reflection of one of the necessary purposes of these discussions, to socially break capitalism's "there-is-no-viable-economic-alternative" ideological defense. Then, given that there are many different viable ways to organize economic production consistent with the broad goals of socialism, the discussion on economic structures immediately expands to what ways seem best to achieve those goals in the eyes of various advocates.

Socially planned social economic production requires society to simultaneously determine what final goods it wants to consume/produce, how much labor and materials from nature it wants to use, how it wants to produce those final goods, and how it wants to distribute them among members of society.

Prior to indicating a selection of 12 of PROPLASO's mid-level concrete procedures, five general economic procedures will be presented that will be used throughout the entire socially planned social economic production process.

*General Procedure 1.* In line with its principle of allowing people to conduct themselves in any way that does not threaten the society and the environment, social labor in PROPLASO can be executed either through State-Owned Productive Units (SOPUs) typical for envisions of socialism, or Non-State-Owned Productive Units (NSOPUs), including self-employed, household production and cooperatives.<sup>10</sup> Society plans all social production, with the mechanisms for planning in PROPLASO differing between SOPUs and NSOPUs.

*General Procedure 2.* Markets will be used for some of the necessary exchanges between production units, and by consumers in obtaining individual consumption goods.

*General Procedure 3.* Two prices will exist for every social product. The first will be its market-price, the price that all goods in markets actually sell for. It will be continually adjusted in order to move demand toward existing supply, and hence drive the markets toward clearing. The other will be its labor-price,<sup>11</sup> a calculation of how many hours of social labor went into producing it. The role of this second

10 Some important aspects of how such institutions would function in a socialist society differ from how they do and can operate in a capitalist society.

11 The terms "market-price" and "labor-price," as defined here, do not take their meaning from Marx and Engel's labor theory of value. PROPLASO holds that socialism will eliminate the concept of value, which lies at the heart of their description of the functioning of capitalism.

price is to create a way, described below, to achieve the socialist goal that “the individual producer receives back from society . . . exactly what he gives to it. What he has given to it is his individual quantum of labor” (Marx, 1989, 86). Considered in relation to the total production of society, the labor-price indicates how much of the total available social labor-time, the fundamental factor in social production, such a product represents. Producing it indicates a social choice to spend that amount of social labor-time creating that specific good, as opposed to any other. In this sense, the labor-price indicates the “social worth” of a good.<sup>12</sup> Because goods actually sell at the market-price, markets clear, and because the market-price is always a close approximation of the labor-price (as is described below), the price at which a good sells is also always approximately its social worth.

*General Procedure 4.* Means of production such as machines, that are used in production for many years until they are either worn out or obsolete, will be produced and used as any intermediate inputs.

*General Procedure 5.* The determination of the amounts of most large-scale, and even many small-scale, social productions will consist of PCS-determined marginal adjustments from the previous period, rather than trying to determine some precise “social preference” by asking everyone every period, “How much do you want of each thing?”

For reason of space, two major abbreviations will be imposed on the rest of this section, which presents some of PROPLASO’s key general and mid-level concrete procedures for socially planning social economic production. First, the social planning of production by NSO-PUs cannot be addressed here, but rather only the more commonly discussed production planning by SOPUs. Second, the procedures will be stated with only bare-bones discussion. Some of these procedures are discussed in my presentation in the second of the three preceding special issues of *Science & Society* on envisioning socialism (Campbell, 2002). The presentation here reflects changes and clarifications in my thinking, as a result of the envisioning socialism discussions over the intervening two decades.

Twelve of PROPLASO’s mid-level concrete procedures follow for determining what final goods society wants to consume/produce, how much labor and materials from nature it wants to use in social

<sup>12</sup> See also Cockshott and Cottrell (1993, 118–121) on such a dual-price system in the case of final consumer goods.

production, how it wants to produce those final goods, and how it wants to distribute them among society's members.

*Procedure 1.* The national population will vote to directly determine (marginally adjusted from the previous time period) the major uses of current GDP by first dividing it between current consumption and investment, and then dividing current consumption between collective<sup>13</sup> and other free goods (hereafter, "COFGs") and individual consumption goods (hereafter ICGs).

*Procedure 2.* PROPLASO determines the demand for COFGs at all levels of society through a multilevel structure of COFG Demand Boards. These are both constituted and operated by PCS processes. Their total demand is predetermined by procedure 1. PROPLASO considers that improved and greatly extended versions of the Participatory Budgeting process, which has arisen over the last 30 years within capitalism as an attempt to increase popular participation in, and control over, governmental budgeting decisions, would be an appropriate PCS procedure for determining the social preference on the mix of COFGs.<sup>14</sup>

The starting point for the calculation of all aspects of the demand for COFGs is what was consumed/produced in the previous period. The principal modifications to that will come from the following.

- i) Change of the total COFGs to be consumed resulting from a change in their percentage of GDP from the social process in procedure 1.
- ii) Change in the mix of COFGs to be consumed as socially determined by some PCS process such as a greatly expanded Participatory Budgeting procedure.
- iii) Demand for new COFGs from society as determined by a PCS process.

The requirement that no level, including zero, of consumption/production of any good damage society or the environment is straightforward to incorporate into the determination of demand for COFGs. Society's scientific/social institutions responsible for determining safe levels of consumption/production will determine such levels for any

<sup>13</sup> Non-excludable and non-rivalrous.

<sup>14</sup> For a brief introduction to the important Participatory Budgeting process, see Marquetti, Shonerwald da Silva and Campbell, 2012.

goods for which they exist, and the social demands indicated by the COFG Demand Boards will not exceed these.

*Procedure 3.* Given the specific demand for all COFGs from procedure 2, PROPLASO targets supplying those goods as follows. A multilevel<sup>15</sup> structure of COFG Production Boards, all of which are both constituted and operated by PCS processes, disaggregates the totals received by the center down to the Productive Units (PUs), indicating a partitioning of total production that would yield the targeted total. The PUs would then either accept the original proposal, or to the contrary indicate what amounts of the goods being requested they believed they could produce. The most important reason for making a counterproposal would be information available to the local PUs but not to the center. These could for example concern changes in the conditions of production in the PU since the last period; difficulties involved in making the marginal adjustments of output being asked for; or difficulties with the introduction of requested new products. These counterproposals would then be passed back through the intermediate levels up to the center for compilation. If the results diverged significantly from the socially determined demand, this whole process could be repeated to adjust what would be produced toward the established target.

*Procedure 4.* PROPLASO determines the expected demand for ICGs by an ICG Demand Board, constituted and operated by PCS processes, and in accord with the social mandate that in total it constitute the percentage of GDP determined in procedure 1.

The starting point for the calculation of all aspects of the demand for ICGs is what was consumed/produced in the previous period. The three principal modifications to that will be the same as for the COFGs in procedure 2. Adjustments i and iii will occur through similar PCS processes. The change in the mix will occur though a different process.

Recall that market-prices are continually adjusted to achieve market clearing, as indicated by an absence of inventory changes or an

15 For all Production Boards, they are multilevel in accord with products to be produced. They have levels of product aggregation analogous to those of the Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) or North American Industrial Classification (NAIC) systems. For example, the total production covered by SIC is first divided into 10 groups. Each of those "aggregated products" is disaggregated into "two-digit" groups, each of those into "three-digit" groups, and each of those into relatively specific "four-digit" groups. The base units of the multilevel Production Boards are the Productive Units (PUs) where actual production of goods takes place. (A single PU could produce more than one product.)



equivalent signal from a just-in-time system, by adjusting demand to existing supply. If the market-price of an ICG is above its labor-price, this signifies that members of society would like more of that good, as indicated by their willingness to give more hours of their social labor than it takes social labor to create that good. The product mix of ICGs is changed from one period to the next by expanding the production of some goods and contracting the production of others, in accord with social preferences as indicated by the relations of their market-prices to their labor-prices.

The requirement that no level, including zero, of consumption/production of any good damage society or the environment needs to be handled differently for ICGs than for COFGs. The starting point is the same: society's scientific/social institutions responsible for determining safe levels of consumption/production will determine such levels for any goods for which they exist, and the social demands indicated by the ICG Demand Board will not exceed these. But PROPLASO has two specific procedures for protecting society and the environment from excessive consumption/production of ICGs, depending on whether the harmful level is zero or some level above that; thus, procedures 5 and 6.

*Procedure 5.* Society's scientific/social committees will establish that for some goods any level of consumption/production is damaging, or that any consumption/production is undesirable because the same results can be achieved by consumption/production of less socially and environmentally harmful alternatives. For these goods, the fundamental instrument for the necessary social regulation is conscious social determination of the menu from which individual consumption choices can be made; such harmful goods will be banned.<sup>16</sup>

One somewhat popular recent idea for social control of consumption has been, analogous to members of society collectively regulating production through workers' councils, to collectively regulate consumption through consumers' councils. PROPLASO holds that such consumers' councils are unnecessary for some of the goals of socialism that they would serve, and directly contrary to others, and therefore holds that socialism should not have consumers' councils.

<sup>16</sup> A ban on production of a good of course would generate the same effect, eliminating production/consumption. I present the social control here as a ban on consumption because I am presenting PROPLASO's process of determining production as society first determining its desired consumption (demand), and then producing (supply) to match that.



Their functioning would consume large amounts of time from the members of society, time which they could better devote to anything else that would promote their human development.

If consumers' councils were the only way to regulate consumption, then they would be necessary. But since all required regulation of consumption/production can be done without this large investment of human time, they are unnecessary. In addition, such a collective determination of all details of individual consumption would limit variety and the exercise of individual choice, beyond what is required by our nature as social individuals to protect the society and the environment that allow such human choices and maximum possible variety. PROPLASO instead socially regulates consumption/production in two ways. First, one large part of a person's consumption will consist of goods that society collectively chooses to provide, collective and free goods (discussed above). The other part of consumption (as also in the models of Devine, Cockshott and Cottrell, and Laibman) will occur through individual choice of goods from those that society produces for individual selection. Society will ban (this is procedure 5) production of any goods that will be harmful in any amount. It will limit the production (procedure 6) of things whose consumption above a certain amount is determined to be harmful. Local consumers' councils will not decide what they want and do not want people to consume, and then pressure their members to consume according to the desires of the majority of that group.

*Procedure 6.* The effects of use of different amounts of renewable resources (for example, fish) or non-renewable resources (for example, fossil oil) on society and the earth's ecology is a scientific/social question, to be determined by scientific investigations. With this information, and given that all human production affects society and the environment, society then needs to make PCS decisions on what goods it considers to have unacceptable effects when consumed/produced above determined levels. PROPLASO addresses this specific problem of unacceptable levels of consumption of individual consumer goods on the environment through goods taxes (GTs) that increase the market-price of the good in question, now independent of its labor-price, to a level that limits demand to the maximum scientifically informed socially-determined level.

*Procedure 7.* Given the specific demand for all ICSs determined by procedures 4–6, PROPLASO would set up a multilevel structure of ICG

Production Boards, all of which are both constituted by and operated by PCS processes, that would operate exactly as the COFG Production Boards in procedure 3.

*Procedure 8.* The distribution of ICGs among consumers would be done in a way to promote choice and variety, both crucial for human development, with the necessary protections of society and the environment already established. A person receives a labor-certificate for each hour of social labor in a SOPU that she engages in.<sup>17</sup> ICGs are purchased with labor certificates.

The planned investment in a socialist society needs to achieve four things: 1) replace worn out physical means of production to maintain current production, 2) continually introduce innovative new processes of production that use less labor to produce current products (subject in particular to the constraint of not harming the environment) or reduce any negative impacts of producing current products on the environment; 3) continually create and produce new goods and services that society feels will additionally support and promote the goal of human development; and 4) adjust supply to move market-clearing market-prices toward labor-prices.

*Procedure 9.* PROPLASO treats replacing worn out means of production to continue existing production in the same way as replacing any other input used up in creating the output. A SOPU would pay for the means-of-production good, and like the costs of all other inputs to its production processes, these would be reflected (appropriately discounted across its longer life) in the costs of its outputs.

*Procedure 10.* An Investment Board for New Products and Processes (IBNPP), constituted by and operated by PCS processes, will allocate the part of the national GDP socially designated for this purpose in procedure 1. Two types of investment for new products or processes would be made. “Greenfield” investments would set up new production units for desired new products, or for fundamentally different production processes for producing existing products with less labor or less negative environmental impact, frequently on the basis of new technology. The second type of investment in this category is for either

<sup>17</sup> This is the procedure Marx suggested in a number of places in his writings, most notably in his *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, as a possible way so that “the individual producer receives back from society . . . exactly what he gives to it . . . his individual quantum of labor” (1989, 86). Note that paying her, say, \$15 for each hour of such work, and denominating all market prices and labor prices in corresponding dollars, is the same system with a renamed unit of account.

of the same two goals, but with investment into transforming existing production units.

Note on procedure 10. Product and process innovation are part of the antagonistic nature of PROPLASO's social self-determination, and specifically an important part of the transformation of the nature of work into developmental labor that forms its third essential feature, and is not discussed in this essay. Specialized bodies will collect suggestions for new products from the entire population in their role as consumers and then poll them to determine social preferences on the suggestions, and other specialized research bodies will continually review existing processes for ways to produce the same goods with less labor. But other ideas on new products and processes will come from workers out of their detailed familiarity with what they produce, either as ideas on major modifications to existing products or processes, or even as qualitatively new products or processes whose concept emerges from the old, just as they have throughout history.<sup>18</sup> (For a clear terse statement of this issue of the essential interaction in socialism between trained specialists and direct producers in the creative improvement of productive processes and the creation of new products, see Levins, 2008, 62–63.)

*Procedure 11.* An Investment Board for Output Adjustment (IBOA) will allocate the part of the national GDP socially assigned for this purpose. Most of this will go to PUs to expand their output of ICGs or COFGs whose supply must be increased, though some might be used for repurposing parts of means of production being withdrawn from use for goods whose output is being contracted.

*Procedure 12.* Workers' councils, constituted and operated by PCS processes, have been a standard part of most envisionings of socialist production since the 19th century. Relative to the previously discussed processes by which society controls its social production, workers' councils concern collective self-governance "at the point of production."

18 The Quality Control Circles from the end of the 20th century, which had some limited success in Japan and largely failed when attempted in the United States, came out of this recognition of what workers have always been able to contribute to redesigning work processes. The fundamental reason for their failure under capitalism was that in that system changes to production processes are made only if they improve profits, and hence worker suggestions were frequently modified in their attempted application in ways that harmed the workers. This led to worker non-participation in these efforts.

The restricted scale of the PUs relative to the national whole must not lead to an undervaluation of the importance of workplace self-governance to the development of the members involved. At present, PUs consume half or more of the waking time of many people, and constitute the way their members provide for a large part of their needs and wants in life. The establishment of workers' councils involves the fundamental change for this large part of every workday from the "animal-like" condition of having their activity externally imposed by owners and managers, to the human condition of collective self-determination of all the decisions necessary for the operation of PUs. It is worthwhile to reflect briefly on how many, and how complex, the decisions are that are necessary to run a PU, and what they therefore contribute to the development of humans as the protagonistic agents of their own history. As such, they are a major part of PROPLASO's, and more generally socialism's, advancement of human development over capitalism. A non-exhaustive list of 30 such PU decisions divided into two types, drawing from Fuller (1992, 6) with minor changes, follows.

*Group 1:* Relationship of workers to their workplace collective: hiring and firing; discipline; promotions, evaluation and training; transfers and leaves; internal information and communication systems; administrative procedures and rules; organizational form; extent and nature of supervision.

*Group 2:* Relationship of workers to one another and to the physical features of work: quality control; working conditions; methods of remuneration; maintenance of machinery and equipment; work methods, task ordering, job division, job rotation, variety of tasks; scheduling; work distribution and assignments; type and level of interaction among workers; employment of technology (that does not seriously impact the physical environment); non-monetary incentives.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Discontent with the existing world-dominating capitalist system is at its highest since World War II, and growing. Society will not carry out the difficult struggle against the minority who benefit from the existing order unless it believes an alternative, which avoids what they find unacceptable in the existing system, is viable. Models that "envision socialism" need to be understood not as recipes for "what must be," but rather as part of the social conversation necessary to raise the

belief that “a better world is possible” to social predominance. Those people who make the transformation must necessarily be those who decide what ideas, from the plethora of viable proposals, they believe will best serve their goal of developing their humanity.

The goal of each of PROPLASO’s concrete proposals is to support and promote socialism’s overall goal of human development, and its many sub-goals that concretize that. The proposals generally arise out of negating procedures in capitalism that prevent the human development which they support and promote. They should be evaluated against both capitalism and any alternative non-capitalist model or narrower non-capitalist operational proposals, in terms of how well they are considered to achieve those goals.

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