

The Concept of 'Fairness': Possibilities, Limits, Possibilities

Michael A. Lebowitz

A spectre is haunting the working class--- the spectre of Communism. For the working class, that frightful hobgoblin is a society of little freedom, a society of workers without power (in the workplace or community) and a society where decisions are made at the top by a vanguard party which views itself as the sole repository of truth. Of course, this was not what communism meant for Marx and Engels nor, indeed, for Lenin. For the visionaries of the 19th century, communism was a society which would foster human development – a society (in Marx's words) in which 'objective wealth is there to satisfy the worker's own need for development'.

But now in the 21st century, it is not the 19th century dream that the working class thinks about. Rather, it is the experience of the 20th century. That memory (both real and exaggerated) has seized the minds of masses; it acts therefore as a material force not easily dissolved by the mantra, 'Communism! Communism!', chanted by philosophers and other magicians of the word. And therein lies today's tragedy. Despite the intensification of capital's class war against the working class, despite capital's insistence that workers must bear the burden of capital's own failures, the working class sees no alternative than to try to say 'NO'. No to cutbacks, no to austerity, no to new user charges, no to the destruction of our lives and our environment. But *not* yes to a socialist alternative. Faced with the living nightmare of 21st century capitalism, workers have seen no apparent alternative other than to mitigate the damage (individually or collectively). That is the tragic result of the destruction of the dream of socialism that occurred in the 20th century.

We need a new vision, a new dream. As Hugo Chavez declared in Porto Alegre in 2005, '*We have to re-invent socialism*'. But where will that vision come from and how will it displace the spectre of 20th century communism? It will not spring full-grown from the forehead of Zeus. Rather, it begins when people get angry, and they get angry when their sense of fairness is violated. Sometimes they protest, sometimes they erupt like a volcano, sometimes they riot--- and sometimes they organize. Sometimes, on the other hand, they do nothing; they grumble and accept that there is no alternative, become cynical and focus on individual escapes and exits. There are both possibilities and limitations in the concept of fairness.

Possibilities

Referring to social norms and beliefs as to right and wrong, E.P. Thompson introduced the concept of 'the moral economy of the poor'. In his classic article, 'The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century', Thompson argued that the food riots of this period reflected a broad and passionate consensus on what was right, leading to a sharp reaction to egregious violations of that conception of justice. Commenting on Thompson's account, a recent Chinese analyst of worker protests in China, Li Jun, observed that those 'rioters were legitimized by the belief that they were

defending traditional rights or customs that were supported by the wider consensus of the community.'

Similarly, in his work on 'the moral economy of the peasant,' James Scott focused upon the notion of economic justice among peasants and pointed to revolts and rebellions which could erupt when notions of fairness were violated. For Scott, these conceptions of justice had their roots in the need for maintaining subsistence rather than opposition to exploitation as such. 'The test for the peasant,' Scott proposed, 'is more likely to be "What is left?" than "How much is taken?"'

From this perspective, exploitation in itself does not generate riots, revolts and rebellions. 'Moral economists,' Jeffrey Kopstein commented (in his study of worker resistance in East Germany), 'posit the existence of a tacit social contract in almost every long-standing social formation in which subaltern groups tolerate their own exploitation.' Those groups tolerate that exploitation as long as they are left enough for themselves--- i.e., are able to secure their expected subsistence. When the prevailing norm is violated, however, Kopstein proposed that it generates 'resistance ranging from shirking, grumbling, foot dragging, false compliance, dissimulation, and other "weapons of the weak," to open strikes and other forms of collective action.' But only to *negate* that violation. According to moral economists, Kopstein reported, 'exploited groups simply want to restore their previous standards before the downturn. Rarely do they try to overturn the existing order altogether.'

The underlying concept here, then, is one of an *equilibrium*--- a concept which Thompson employed explicitly in talking about 'a particular set of social relations, a particular equilibrium between paternalist authority and the crowd.' When that equilibrium is disturbed, there is a feedback mechanism: masses (peasants, crowd, workers) react to restore the conditions corresponding to the social norms supported by the consensus of the community. Thus, all other things equal, there is a tendency toward stability.

We can see this phenomenon in the 'real socialism' (or the 'actually existing socialism') of the latter part of the 20th Century, a term introduced in the Soviet Union to distinguish its real experience from merely theoretical ideas about socialism. In what has been described as the social contract characteristic of 'real socialism', workers had definite expectations as to their entitlement. They expected rising income over time, subsidized necessities, relative egalitarianism and especially job rights--- not only the guarantee of a job (which was supported by a full employment policy) but also protection from any changes in their existing jobs which they did not want. In return, workers accepted the rule of the vanguard party in the workplace and society and comprehensive restrictions upon any power and, indeed, initiatives, from below.

'There was a system of mutual obligations,' Boris Kagarlitsky explained with respect to the Soviet Union:

We use the term 'obligatory social contract' or asymmetrical social contract, meaning that the population was forced into this social contract. The social contract was definitely not free. On the other hand, if you lived in the country you understood that, though the population was forced into this contract, it was accepted, not just because there was no other way, but because people liked certain aspects of the contract.

The right of everyone to subsistence and a growing standard of life, the importance of stable prices and full employment, the orientation toward egalitarianism (and thus low income differentials)--- all these were part of the norms which formed the moral economy of the working class in ‘real socialism.’ While that social contract did not exclude exploitation, it did yield something workers wanted. Kopstein argued, for example, that ‘along with job security, East German workers had the power to demand a rough-and-ready sort of wage egalitarianism and consumer prices that remained low relative to wages.’

And the same argument for a moral economy of the working class and the support for this which the social contract provided is explicit in Li Jun’s examination of strikes in China: ‘Simply put, in the Chinese socialist setting, workers view themselves as having a relationship with the state, a relationship which operates according to the norm of reciprocity: the state is expected to have committed itself to ensuring that the workers have a decent living by providing job security and a prodigious welfare package, while workers, in return, advocate the party ruling by giving their political support and loyalty to the state.’ To support what Li Jun calls ‘the workers’ moral economy,’ it was expected that the state authority would fulfill ‘its responsibility to protect and benefit its working class in the form of the “iron rice bowl”’.

What occurred in ‘real socialism’ when this popular consensus of justice and fairness was violated? According to the Hungarian economist Janos Kornai, when this occurred, a process of feed-back tended to restore an equilibrium. When the economy generates ‘results which deviate from existing norms (the result of “habit, convention, tacit or legally supported social acceptance, or conformity”), the system generates signals that are fed back into the system’. Kornai argued that central decision-makers in Hungary had as a target a normal rate of growth of real consumption per head of 3-4 percent with the result that ‘if the growth of consumption remains below its normal rate, the scale of investment will be reduced so as to leave more of the national income for consumption.’

And, it was very clear to Kornai why those at the top acted in this way. They were limited by what ‘the population is content to accept, and where dissatisfaction begins.’ There was a potential cost to violating the norms. ‘Holding back increases in living standards, or their absolute reduction, and infringing the lower limit . . . sooner or later entails serious political and social consequences, tension and even shocks, which after a shorter or longer lag force a correction.’ In short, behind the attempt of the vanguard to avoid deviations from the norm was the anticipation of the responses of workers (e.g., to increased prices). People, Kornai stated, wanted price stability, ‘and after a time they even expect the government to guarantee it. Any important price increase gives rise to unrest.’

Accordingly, Kornai argued that those at the top were limited. The barrier ‘depends on the actual socio-political situation, what level and growth rate of consumption the population is content to accept, and where dissatisfaction begins. And, if there is dissatisfaction, at what point it starts to endanger the stability of the system. It is a historical fact that unrest may be so great that it induces leaders to change economic policy.’

Thus, we can see in ‘real socialism’ that the moral economy of the working class was reinforced during this period by the honouring of the existing social contract. Those at the top understood that people would respond to perceived violations of the social

contract (as they did in riots in 1962 in the Soviet Union in response to price increases), and they took those potential responses into account in their actions. When ideas grasp the minds of masses, Marx noted, ideas are a material force. And, when people struggle to reverse violations of their concepts of right and wrong, those concepts are clearly a material force rather than disembodied ideas.

However, in such struggles more occurs than just the return to an initial equilibrium. Even though people may not be struggling against exploitation as such, something more than what they themselves intend is produced in that process. This was Marx's concept of revolutionary practice--- the coincidence of the changing of circumstances and human activity or self-change. Very simply, people change in the course of struggle. Despite the limited goals involved, Marx commented in 1853 that wage struggles prevented workers 'from becoming apathetic, thoughtless, more or less well-fed instruments of production'; without them, workers would be 'a heart-broken, a weak-minded, a wornout, unresisting mass.' And he returned to the same point in 1865, noting that workers who did not engage in wage struggles 'would be degraded to one level mass of broken wretches past salvation.'

Can we doubt this point? After all, those who are not engaged in struggle are producing themselves as people of a particular type. Thus, even though the moral economy of the working class as such is not an immediate challenge to exploitation, it can be the basis for a process by which workers themselves change in the course of struggle. This, then, is the possibility inherent in the concepts of right and wrong and of fairness characteristic of the moral economy of the working class. It is the possibility of building upon those existing beliefs to the point of challenging exploitation and the system itself directly.

Limitations

And, yet, the example of 'real socialism' points to the real limits of that moral economy. It demonstrates that concepts of fairness and of a consensus of what is right and what is wrong are not sufficient to prevent their violation. After all, in 'real socialism', the social contract which embodied and reinforced the moral economy of the working class was not merely unfulfilled in some respect. On the contrary, it was unilaterally *revoked* by the vanguard. And, rather than this leading to resistance by the working class to restore the social contract, there was no appreciable resistance to the ending of the social contract whether it was in the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, China or, currently, in Cuba.

And, this problem is not simply a particular characteristic of 'real socialism'. After all, consider what happened to the 'moral economy of the poor' discussed by E.P. Thompson. The historic 'particular set of social relations, a particular equilibrium between paternalist authority and the crowd' that he described also came to an end. As in the case of 'real socialism', Thompson observed that 'the "nature of things" which had once made imperative, in times of dearth, at least some symbolic solidarity between the rulers and the poor, now dictated solidarity between the rulers and "the Employment of Capital".'

If we add to these cases, the experience in the developed capitalist world in the period after World War II when the so-called 'Golden Age' and 'capital-labour accord' were dissolved from the top without serious resistance from the working class, there appears to be a definite pattern. And that is that in every 'tacit social contract' based merely upon inherited concepts of fairness, the 'subaltern groups' cannot prevent the social contract from being abandoned entirely by those who rule.

To understand why, consider Marx's discussion of the spontaneous concepts of fairness characteristic of workers in 19th Century capitalism. Marx understood that the attitudes and notions of moral economy exist at the surface of society; rather than revealing the actual relations, they reflect how things appear (and may necessarily appear) to the real actors. What is apparent in everyday life spontaneously produces the ideas that grasp the minds of masses and underlie their actions.

After all, what did workers in mid-19th Century Europe struggle about? In his *Value, Price and Profit*, Marx observed that 99% of wage struggles followed changes that had led wages to fall. 'In one word,' he noted, they were 'reactions of labour against the previous action of capital.' In short, those wage struggles were an attempt to restore the '*traditional standard of life*' which was under attack.

The spontaneous impulse of workers under these conditions, accordingly, was to struggle for 'fairness' against the violations of existing norms--- indeed, to fight a guerilla war against effects initiated by capital. The explicit goal of workers, Marx noted, was to struggle for 'a fair day's wage for a fair day's work.' In doing so, they were not attempting to change the system nor, indeed, struggling against exploitation (except insofar as exploitation was understood as unfairness). Accordingly, Marx described the demands of workers as 'conservative' and argued that, instead of those demands for fairness, 'they ought to inscribe on their banner the *revolutionary* watchword, 'Abolition of the wages system!''

Yet, Marx understood quite well *why* the workers' slogan focused upon fair wages and a fair workday: it flows from the necessary appearance of a transaction in which the worker yields the property right to use her capacity to work (i.e., her labour power) for a given period. 'On the surface of bourgeois society,' Marx pointed out in *Capital*, 'the worker's wage appears as the price of labour, as a certain quantity of money that is paid for a certain quantity of labour.' Thus, the conscious struggle of workers is over the *fairness* of 'the certain quantity of money' and the *fairness* of the 'certain quantity of labour.' What is perceived as just and fair is that they receive an equivalent for their labour--- i.e., that they are not 'cheated.' This follows from the way the wage necessarily appears. From the form of the wage as the payment for a given workday, Marx commented, comes 'all the notions of justice held by both the worker and the capitalist.'

'Nothing is easier,' he declared, 'to understand than the necessity, the *raison d'etre*, of this form of appearance' which underlies the moral economy of the working class in capitalism. In short, this appearance was not an accident; nor was the moral economy of workers based upon appearances an accident. On the surface, the worker sells her labour to the capitalist. However, this form of appearance 'makes the actual relation invisible, and indeed presents to the eye the precise opposite of that relation.' Specifically, there appears to be no exploitation, no division of the workday into necessary and surplus labour; rather, all labour appears as paid labour. Precisely because

exploitation is hidden on the surface, it is necessary to delve below the surface: 'The forms of appearance are reproduced directly and spontaneously, as current and usual modes of thought; the essential relation must first be discovered by science.'

At the level of appearances, in short, we cannot understand capitalism. 'The interconnection of the reproduction process,' Marx commented, 'is not understood.' Accordingly, he rejected a focus on individual commodity transactions and examined the underlying structure of capitalism. What was the nature of the system and how was it reproduced? And that is the central question in *Capital*. Considering workers as a whole, he assumed that, in return for yielding to the capitalist the use of their capacities, workers receive their 'traditional standard of life,' what is necessary to reproduce themselves as wage-labourers in a given time and place. This concept of a given level of necessity (the basis for the value of labour-power) allowed him to demonstrate how the workday is divided into necessary labour and surplus labour and how exploitation of workers is the necessary condition for the reproduction of capitalists.

For this absolutely critical deduction, however, Marx did not have to explain the basis of this existing standard of necessity. Indeed, he simply *assumed* it as given --- an assumption he intended to remove in his projected book on Wage-Labour. With this approach, Marx was able to reveal the nature of capital and its inherent tendencies--- something that a focus upon appearances can never reveal. Thus, the case was made for the necessity to end capitalist relations of production rather than to struggle for 'fair wages.'

How else could we understand what capital is *without* the critique of those forms of appearance which underlie the moral economy of the working class in capitalism? Indeed, the apparent relation of exchange between capitalist and worker strengthens the rule of capital: it 'mystifies' the actual relation and 'ensures the perpetuation of the specific relationship of dependency, endowing it with the deceptive *illusion* of a transaction.' To enable workers to go beyond that conservative motto to the 'revolutionary watchword,' Marx offered the weapon of critique--- a critique based upon an alternative political economy, the political economy of the working class.

However, the political economy of the working class introduced by Marx in *Capital* was incomplete. What determines the standards underlying concepts of fairness-- - i.e., that equilibrium which is the basis of consensus? This is not a question that Marx explicitly considered theoretically. Marx, after all, began with the assumption that the traditional standard of life, the standard of necessity, was *given*. While that assumption was sufficient to demonstrate that capital is the result of the exploitation of workers, with this assumption we can not explore theoretically what determines the standard of necessity. Accordingly, we are unable to consider the factors which cause the standard of necessity to *change*. What allows it to be driven downward? And, what prevents this?

Beyond Capital demonstrates that with the *removal* of this assumption of a fixed standard of life, it is no longer possible to argue that the automatic effect of productivity increases is the growth of exploitation (relative surplus value). To understand the determination of the standard of necessity and the rate of exploitation (and any movements in these), the state of class struggle is essential to consider. For this purpose, I introduced as a variable the concept of 'the degree of separation among workers', a concept that draws upon Marx's observations in *Capital* that 'the dispersal of the rural

workers breaks their power of resistance, while concentration increases that of the urban workers' and 'the workers' power of resistance declines with their dispersal' (BK,87).

By explicitly articulating this variable, we acknowledge that the potential for collective struggle (both its emergence and its prospect for success) will be significantly influenced by the degree of separation of workers. If workers are isolated and atomised, if they are separated from other workers and indeed view them as enemies, then there is little prospect for collective action. As Marx commented with respect to the antagonism between English and Irish workers, this is 'the *secret of the impotence of the English working class*, despite its organization.'

Indeed, it should be obvious that workers are separated not only by purely economic factors. Racism, sexism, geographical location as well as legal and ideological barriers to collective action all contribute to separation among workers. And, thus they contribute to the maintenance of existing structures. Marx noted with respect to the impotence of the English working class that the separation of English and Irish workers is 'the secret by which the capitalist class maintains its power. And that class is fully aware of it.'

While clearly relevant to capitalism, this aspect of class struggle transcends capitalism itself. In *Beyond Capital*, I stressed that in any society 'those who mediate among producers have an interest in maintaining and increasing the degree of separation, division and atomization among producers in order to continue to secure the fruits of cooperation in production' (BK, 99, 86-7). And, we can see what happens, all other things equal, when there are significant increases in the degree of separation among workers.

When overaccumulation of capital and the ensuing increase in the intensity of capitalist competition (a process which began before the much-evoked more recent process of globalisation of capital) brings with it an assault upon the apparent capital-labour accord, and when the economic crisis in 'real socialism' leads to attacks upon the egalitarian impulses and job rights of workers--- in short, upon the social contract of 'real socialism', we see clearly that the equilibrium characteristic of an existing moral economy is only an *apparent* one, one that rests upon the reproduction of a given degree of separation of producers.

As long as the degree of separation (or the balance of class forces) is constant, this implies the reproduction of an equilibrium in which any deviations produce feedback tendencies to restore the norms. And, insofar as such deviations are temporary, it strengthens the belief in the permanency of those particular norms. But the existing moral economy itself can never explain its basis--- i.e., *why* those particular beliefs as to what is fair are present--- and thus why those norms can change. To grasp the conditions which underlie concepts of fairness at a given moment, it is necessary to move from the moral economy of the working class to the political economy of the working class.

For revolutionaries who would help to put an end to existing structures of exploitation and deformation, it is essential to recognise the importance of the moral economy of the working class but to go beyond it. We need to understand how the system is reproduced and how divisions among producers play an essential role in that reproduction. With that understanding, there is possibility.

Possibilities

However, understanding the nature of the system as the source of the anger and unhappiness of people is not a sufficient condition for going beyond the system. It is also essential to focus upon the alternative implicit in the political economy of the working class--- what Marx called in *Capital* 'the worker's own need for development'. For people whose sense of fairness has been violated, the vision of an alternative is necessary--- one that can appear to workers as a new common sense, as *their* common sense. Like the worst architect, for the revolutionary labour process we must build that goal in our minds before we can construct it in reality; only this conscious purpose can ensure the purposeful will required.

Rather than the abstract proletarians characteristic of bad theory, though, the starting point should be real people with particular ideas and concepts which are reflected in an existing moral economy. As we see, the existing concepts of fairness as reflected in the moral economy of the working class are seriously limited. Not only is it impossible at this level to understand the basis of those current concepts but the spontaneous tendency of moral economy is to look *backward*. Characteristic is the attempt to restore a previous equilibrium--- either an immediate one or an idealised one from the past. It is a vision of the past rather than a vision for the future.

To see the future in the present is what is needed if we are to build that future. To articulate what is implicit in current concepts and struggles is essential for the development of a conscious vision of a new society. By considering current social norms and beliefs as to what is right and what is wrong, we can avoid the tendency to begin with a preconceived theory and to see nothing else. Further, we also may be able to identify elements in the moral economy that potentially point beyond towards a new society, a society of associated producers.

In the book that I have just completed, *Contradictions in 'Real Socialism'*, for example, I identified three elements in the moral economy of the working class in 'real socialism' that contain implicitly within them characteristics of a society of associated producers. In the orientation of workers toward egalitarianism, we can see glimpses of one such characteristic--- the focus upon the common ownership of the means of production, which implies the right to share equally as owners. As the repeated exhortations of the vanguard against egalitarianism demonstrate, this sense of entitlement had real lasting power in the minds of workers.

Further, solidarity of workers within their individual workplaces as manifested in their mutual support in protecting each other against managers and through their spontaneous cooperation in making production possible generated a sense of their collective power and latent support for workers' control. Just as the spontaneous food riots of the 18th Century revealed the underlying moral economy of the crowd, so also does the spontaneous emergence of workers councils (as in Hungary in 1956 and Poland in 1980) allow us to infer the existence of an underlying consensus among workers. And, this orientation toward worker management was acknowledged by the vanguard itself when it sought to shore up support for its role (as in Yugoslavia in 1950, Czechoslovakia in 1968 and initial gestures in perestroika).

Finally, within that moral economy was a tendency for people to help each other without demanding an equivalent in return. An 'economy of favours' is how Ledeneva described the Soviet Union. Rather than relations in which alienated, mutually indifferent

individuals exchange alienated things, characteristic of ‘real socialism’ is the presence of gift relations within networks of friends and family. That gift relation, she notes, is ‘created and preserved by a mutual sense of “fairness” and trust.’ It presumes people who have a bond, people who have a past and hope to have a future, and its product is the enhancement of solidarity within these bounds. In this third element of the moral economy of the working class in real socialism, there is latent a society based upon solidarity and community, one where we support others to the best of our ability.

In the moral economy of the working class in ‘real socialism,’ we thus can glimpse three sides of what I identified in *The Socialist Alternative* as the organic system of socialism (which Hugo Chavez of Venezuela called the ‘elementary socialist triangle’): social ownership of the means of production, social production organized by workers and communal needs and purposes as the goal of productive activity. By articulating the characteristics of this particular combination of production, distribution and consumption, it is possible to present a coherent vision that transcends the existing moral economy.

And, it is not only in ‘real socialism’ that such elements are implicit. In current struggles within capitalism (both within imperialist and colonial countries), similar themes are present: equality, democracy and solidarity. By themselves, those themes represent partial rejections of existing structures; however, to the extent that they remain partial, they can not offer a vision that goes beyond the existing moral economy. By demonstrating their interdependence within an organic socialist system, it is possible to offer an alternative common sense, one which contains a new sense of fairness, the potential for a new moral economy.

Of course, we all know that the ‘real socialism’ of the 20th Century is not that vision. There is, though, a new vision of socialism that has emerged in the 21st century as an alternative to the barbarism of capitalism. At its core is the alternative that Marx evoked in *Capital*: in contrast to a society in which the worker exists to satisfy the need of capital for its growth, Marx pointed to ‘the inverse situation, in which objective wealth is there to satisfy the worker’s own need for development.’ Human development, in short, is at the centre of this vision of the alternative to capitalism.

From his early discussion of a ‘rich human being’ to his later comments about the ‘development of the rich individuality which is as all-sided in its production as in its consumption,’ the ‘development of all human powers as such the end in itself’ and ‘the all-around development of the individual,’ Marx focused upon our need for the full development of our capacities; this is the essence of his conception of socialism--- a society that removes all obstacles to the full development of human beings.

But Marx always understood that human development requires practice. It does not come as a gift from above. His concept of ‘revolutionary practice,’ that concept of ‘the coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-change,’ is the red thread that runs throughout his work. In every process of human activity, there is more than one product of labour. Starting from his articulation of the concept of ‘revolutionary practice,’ Marx consistently stressed that, through their activity, people simultaneously change as they change circumstances. We develop ourselves, in short, through our own practice and are the products of all our activities--- the products of our struggles (or the lack of same), the products of all the relations in which we produce and

interact. In every human activity, in short, there is a *joint product*--- both the change in the object of labour and the change in the labourer herself.

Marx's unity of human development and practice constitutes the *key link* that we need to grasp if we are to talk about socialism. What kind of productive relations can provide the conditions for the full development of human capacities? Only those in which there is conscious cooperation among associated producers; only those in which the goal of production is that of the workers themselves. Worker management which ends the division between thinking and doing is essential--- but clearly this requires more than worker-management in individual workplaces. They must be the goals of workers in society, too -- workers in their communities.

Implicit in the emphasis upon this key link of human development and practice, accordingly, is our need to be able to develop through democratic, participatory and protagonistic activity in every aspect of our lives. Through revolutionary practice in our communities, our workplaces and in all our social institutions, we produce ourselves as 'rich human beings'--- rich in capacities and needs--- in contrast to the impoverished and crippled human beings that capitalism produces. This concept is one of democracy in *practice*, democracy *as practice*, *democracy as protagonism*. Democracy in this sense--- protagonistic democracy in the workplace, protagonistic democracy in neighbourhoods, communities, communes--- is the democracy of people who are transforming themselves into revolutionary subjects.

Social production organized by workers is essential for developing the capacities of producers and building new relations -- relations of cooperation and solidarity. If workers do not make decisions in their workplaces and communities and develop their capacities, we can be certain that *someone else will*. In short, protagonistic democracy in all our workplaces is an essential condition for the full development of the producers

But, as I have suggested, there are other elements in this socialist combination. The society we want to build is one which recognizes that 'the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.' How can we ensure, though, that our communal, social productivity is directed to the free development of *all* rather than used to satisfy the private goals of capitalists, groups of individuals, or state bureaucrats? *Social ownership of the means of production* is that second side. Of course, it is essential to understand that social ownership is not the same as state ownership. Social ownership implies a profound democracy -- one in which people function as subjects, both as producers and as members of society, in determining the use of the results of our social labour.

Are common ownership of the means of production and cooperation in the process of production, however, sufficient to for 'ensuring overall human development'? What kind of people are produced when we relate to others through an exchange relation and try to get the best deal possible for ourselves? This brings us to the third side of the triangle: *satisfaction of communal needs and communal purposes*. Here, the focus is upon the importance of basing our productive activity upon the recognition of our common humanity and our needs as members of the human family. In short, the premise is the development of a solidararian society--- one in which we go beyond self-interest and where, through our activity, we both build solidarity among people and at the same time produce ourselves differently.

Communicating that vision is essential. Of course, it is not easy. The Battle of Ideas is never easy--- especially in times of crisis, when the spontaneous tendency is to look backward to the old moral economy and to search for scapegoats to explain what has gone wrong. There is, further, no lack of alternative visions rooted in existing cultures and religions that foster the focus upon scapegoats. For this reason, in the ideological struggle, we need to try to articulate what is implicit in current concepts and struggles and to develop a conscious vision of a new society.

I have argued that at the core of such a vision is the concept of the ‘key link’ of human development and practice—a concept which is easiest to accept when people think about what they want for their children. To this end, I proposed in *The Socialist Alternative* a simple set of propositions, a ‘Charter for Human Development’ that can be recognized as self-evident requirements for human development:

1. Everyone has the right to share in the social heritage of human beings—an equal right to the use and benefits of the products of the social brain and the social hand—in order to be able to develop his or her full potential.
2. Everyone has the right to be able to develop their full potential and capacities through democracy, participation, and protagonism in the workplace and society--- a process in which these subjects of activity have the precondition of the health and education that permit them to make full use of this opportunity.
3. Everyone has the right to live in a society in which human beings and nature can be nurtured—a society in which we can develop our full potential in communities based upon cooperation and solidarity.

The goal of such a charter is to try to redefine the concept of fairness. To stress that it is *unfair* that some people monopolize the social heritage of all human beings, that it is *unfair* that some people are able to develop their capacities through their activities while others are crippled and deformed, and that it is *unfair* that we are forced into structures in which we view others as competitors and enemies.

Is it possible to redefine the concept of fairness and to build a new moral economy of the working class? Certainly, it is not inevitable. The choice before us is familiar: socialism or barbarism.