

Thinking about Revolution

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"What do we mean by the Revolution? The war? That was no part of the revolution; it was only an effect and consequence of it. The revolution was in the minds of the people, and this was effected from 1760 – 1775, in the course of fifteen years, before a drop of blood was shed at Lexington."

–John Adams, Letter to Thomas Jefferson, August 24, 1815

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Once again the time has come for revolution in America. Instead of a British king we have a ruling class of bankers and billionaires who control the government and all the important institutions of society. Despite the electoral circus and other trappings of democracy, the big shots call the tune. Politicians serve them, not us. This dictatorship of the rich has pushed economic inequality to obscene levels, has left more and more Americans unemployed or working at jobs that pay too little, has driven homes into foreclosure, deprived families of adequate medical care, saddled young people with huge student loans, caused environmental disasters like BP in the Gulf, and sent loved ones to kill or be killed in wars based on lies. The future holds misery for the many and privilege for the few.

These and other problems are part of a system in which money is power and most people don't have any. The powerful men and women who run our world were not elected and cannot be unelected. They can only be removed from power by revolution.

The goal of democratic revolution is to break the power of the ruling elite and create a society run by and for the people: a true democracy.

A change in who has power, however, is not enough. We also need a change in the goals and values that shape society. The greed and selfishness that dom-

inate our society must be swept away along with the system that promotes them, to be replaced by democratic values and common decency.

Real democracy will require a whole new organization of society. This paper proposes radical changes in how we think about ourselves and what we imagine human possibilities to be. It proposes a democratic structure based on confidence in the values and good sense of ordinary people.

We are writing to invite you to a discussion of how to make a revolution and what the new society should be like. We hope you will spread "Thinking" far and wide and begin discussing the idea of revolution with your family, friends and co-workers.

Some people believe a better world is not possible because inequality and greed are just "human nature." Others believe the history of Communism shows that revolutions only make things worse. Still others think that the great power of the ruling elite makes revolution impossible.

"Thinking" presents a very different view. We believe a better world is possible, that it will take a democratic revolution to create it, and that such a revolution can indeed succeed, despite the power of those ruling our present society.

Only revolution can fulfill the aspirations of the great majority of people for a better world. The mass uprisings in the past, including the social revolution in Spain from 1936 to 1939, and the "Arab Spring" uprisings in the Middle East in 2011, show that a movement involving at first just a handful of people can grow into a mass revolutionary movement. If a movement taps into long-standing, heart-felt grievances and hopes of a people, it can shake the world.

"Thinking About Revolution" is focused on America but in principle it pertains to every society where the money-men hold the people in their grip. We should begin to do in America what people across the globe have already begun. A global revolutionary movement can create a new world.

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Summary of Proposals for a New Society

We propose a democratic revolution to sweep away the system of elite power and class domination that so distorts our present world. We propose a new society in which:

- All who contribute to society, or who are not obligated to do so because they are children, elderly or otherwise unable to work, have free and equal access to its goods and services, which are shared according to need, not bought and sold. Money is not used. There are no rich and no poor people.
- All the things that people use to produce goods, such as factories and mines and large tracts of land, belong to all the people. These things are like the air we breathe and the sunshine that warms us—a common treasure for all of society, not the property of a few.
- The goal of economic production is to provide the things and services people need and want, not to make profits for capitalists.
- Human lives are no longer degraded nor the earth ravaged for the greed of a few. Instead of mindless growth laying waste the earth, we have creative, bottom-up planning to create a paradise.
- There is no unemployment. The more people want to pitch in to do the work, the better for everyone. Work-time is dramatically reduced. Automation is used to liberate workers from drudgery rather than to speed up or control them or put them out of work without pay.
- Everybody has a home to live in, good food to eat, good health care when they need it, a good education for the whole family, and an equal right to enjoy all the other products and services and benefits that society makes possible. If any of these things are scarce then they are rationed equitably according to need.

There will be no unemployment.

- There is genuine democracy based on local assemblies of all community residents and all working people. All political power is vested in local community and workplace assemblies. Congress, state legislatures, city and town councils, and all other instruments of the former capitalist state are disbanded.
- All adults who embrace the principles of mutual aid, equality and democracy have an equal say in decisions.
- All workers have an equal say in workplace decisions. People do not work for somebody else; they work with each other for the common good.
- Workplace assemblies determine the hours of work required per week and per year based on their assessment of needs and each worker's personal circumstances. In a highly productive society with no unemployment and no overwork, time spent working will be drastically reduced.
- Local and workplace assemblies decide how to meet the needs of community members for food, shelter, health care, and other necessities. When local needs exceed local capacity these assemblies use voluntary federation, to coordinate with each other, carry out plans for the common good and share economic products and services on a large scale.
- The Pentagon, the military, the police, and other instruments of capitalist power are disbanded. Communities organize to meet local needs for safety and protection.
- There are no more unjust wars. People no longer feel helpless before the mass murderers who control the government today. People take power into their own hands.

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What is Democratic Revolution?

Democratic revolution is the act of the great majority of people removing power from the former wealthy ruling elite, taking power into their own hands, and reshaping society to provide well-being for all based on principles of mutual aid, equality, and democracy.

- **Mutual aid (solidarity):** People help each other rather than compete against one another.
- **Equality:** All people have an equal right to enjoy the benefits of the earth's resources and the wealth produced by society.
- **Democracy:** Local assemblies of people in communities and places of work decide what they will do and how they will do it, with no "higher body" having power over them. Social order is achieved not by laws imposed on people from above but by agreements arrived at among local assemblies linked through voluntary federation.

The words "democratic" and "democracy" have been thoroughly corrupted in our present world to refer to the anti-democratic dictatorship of the rich in which we live. We mean something entirely different: not this fake democracy we have in the United States in which politicians are front men and women for the real power hidden behind the scenes. By "democracy" we mean government of the people, by the people, and for the people. By "the people" we do not mean capitalists or the super-rich who live off other people's labor or those who manage workers on behalf of capitalists. We mean the people who do the work that sustains human society.

Where Are We? How Did We Get Here?

People may be deeply angry with the way the United States is going, but there hasn't seemed to be much resistance. Ordinary people have been beaten down by corporate America and its hireling politicians and the corporate media for forty years. All this has left

people feeling powerless to change things. Not to mention that it hasn't been exactly clear what to do.

Demonstrations pleading for our "leaders" to do the right thing have been a bust. A lot of us put our faith in the Democrats in '06 or in Obama in '08—and a lot of good that did. We've been betrayed by all the organizations that we thought were on our side: the government, the politicians, the unions, the political parties, the churches, the synagogues, the schools and colleges, the media. The upper class* uses every institution in society to control ordinary people, the people who make things or do things but don't run things—people like us. There is no institution that represents us or fights for our interests. We're on our own.

The effect of this is very disorienting. We are lied to every day, so it's hard to know what is true. They tell us not to trust our own experience. Deep down we may understand the situation, but the leaders keep telling us that everything we know to be true is false.

The official leaders of society—starting with the President, and including Congress, the Courts, the other politicians, the media and the union leaders and the talking heads on TV and the loudmouths on radio—are all in on the same lies. They may even appear to violently disagree, but not one of them exposes the system for what it is. Not one of them tells the whole, ugly truth. Not one of them rallies the people against our real enemies.

The Revolution of Rising Expectations

To understand why people seem so beaten down, we have to see how we got here.

In the 1960s and early '70s, a "revolution of rising expectations" swept the world. Ordinary people took to the streets, challenging the rule of capitalist and Communist elites alike. In Poland shipyard workers

* For discussion of who, exactly, make up what we refer to as the upper class, ruling class or ruling elite, go to http://newdemocracyworld.org/world_who_rules.html. By 'upper class' we mean that top 0.5% to 1% of the population who exercise effective control over the corporations, the banks, the media, the government. We do not mean people who simply have a higher than average income.

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burned the Communist Party headquarters to the ground. In Prague workers and students fought Soviet tanks. In France in May 1968, ten million workers and students went on a "wildcat" (unauthorized) general strike, occupying their factories and offices and universities. President Charles DeGaulle and his wife fled the country.

The U.S. was swept by the civil rights movement, powered by the heroic actions of black people facing police dogs and clubs. A powerful movement against the Vietnam War took root in communities and college campuses and in the military itself, where troops began to "frag" gung-ho officers and refuse to fight. The country was swept by wildcat strikes by workers in defiance of union officials. When Teamsters in 1970 went on their first national wildcat strike, the National Guard was called out in Ohio to protect scabs. After a student strike broke out at Kent State University in response to the U.S. invasion of Cambodia, these same National Guard units were sent to the campus and murdered four students. Auto workers in Lordstown, Ohio and Detroit and elsewhere struck against speed-up and brutal work conditions. Coal miners in West Virginia and Kentucky struck against their union and the coal operators. U.S. postal workers mounted an illegal, wildcat national strike led by the New York City local. Everywhere, it seemed, workers were rebelling against union officials and their cozy relationship with management. Everywhere people were challenging the authorities.

The Empire Strikes Back

The world-wide revolutionary upsurge scared the hell out of the ruling elites of the world. In September 1972 the CEOs of the 200 largest corporations in America met in Washington, D.C. to map out a strategy to go on the counteroffensive. They formed the Business Roundtable to direct a wide-ranging counteroffensive that left no part of Americans' lives untouched. On the international side, David Rockefeller and others organized the Trilateral Commission, involving representatives of the US, Western Europe, and Japan. The history of the last forty years in America is the history of government and corpor-

ate leaders trying to break the spirit of American working people.

To counter the revolution of rising expectations, the rulers reasoned, they had to lower people's expectations. Business leaders undertook a massive public relations effort to convince the public that the gains working people had made during the '60s were having a negative effect on the competitive position of the US. An oft-cited *Business Week* editorial proclaimed on October 12, 1974:

***"It will be a bitter pill for people to swallow—
the idea of having less
so that big business can have more."***

"It will be a bitter pill for people to swallow—the idea of having less so that big business can have more. Nothing that this nation or any other nation has done in modern history compares with the selling job that must be done to make people accept the new reality."

Corporate and government leaders pressed their counteroffensive on many fronts. Corporations went on the attack with sharply-intensified supervision and disciplinary practices, speed-up, and other measures. They began to spend millions on union-busting consulting firms. They began to "deindustrialize" America. Doug Fraser, then the president of the United Auto Workers union, said that business "has declared a new class war."

Democratic and Republican administrations alike slashed social programs like unemployment insurance and welfare. They attacked workers' pensions and health care plans. The government gave tax breaks to corporations to ship jobs overseas and replace workers with machines. The balance of class forces shifted dramatically in 1981 when President Reagan fired 11,000 striking PATCO union air traffic controllers, and the International Association of Machinists (IAM), whose members filled crucial jobs at airports, ordered its members to cross PATCO picket lines. Three decades of union betrayal of workers followed. Hormel, Caterpillar, Staley, Detroit News: these and other workers' struggles were defeated when the International unions joined with the companies to break their strikes.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, U.S. rulers needed a new enemy with which to frighten the

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American people and prevent us from identifying the real class enemy at home. In 2001 the 9/11 attack provided our rulers with a “new Pearl Harbor” to justify police-state measures against the American people and to legitimize a “War on Terror” against a new enemy. The authors of “Thinking” and many pilots, architects and responding firemen believe that the official story about 9/11 is a lie and that overwhelming evidence suggests that 9/11 was an inside job.[†] Our own rulers orchestrated the 9/11 attack on Americans in order to replace Communism with Radical Islam as the omnipresent danger. The government launched wars in Afghanistan and Iraq to project U.S. power, feed the arms industry, and stoke fear in the American people.[‡]

Four decades of attack by the most powerful ruling class on earth have had their effects. There were only five work stoppages in 2009 involving 1,000 or more employees—the fewest since 1947, when record-keeping began. U.S. workers’ inflation-adjusted wages peaked in 1972 and have declined 6% since then, while their productivity has increased more than 114% in the same period. Working families now need multiple jobs to supply their needs, and are still falling into debt. About 17.4 million families lacked enough money to feed themselves at some point in 2009. More than 45 million Americans are now on food stamps.

[†] For discussion of this, see http://newdemocracyworld.org/9-11/david_ray_griffin_miracles-1.html and www.newdemocracyworld.org/world_911.html

[‡] For more discussion of how our rulers use war to control us, see the following by John Spritzler: *The People As Enemy: The Leaders’ Hidden Agenda in World War II* (available at Amazon.com), “Concealing the Real Goals of War” (<http://newdemocracyworld.org/old/Concealing.htm>); “Why is Israel Killing Gazans?” (<http://www.newdemocracyworld.org/old/War/Why%20Is%20Israel.htm>)

The Looting of America

“There’s class warfare, all right, but it’s my class, the rich class, that’s making war, and we’re winning.”

– Warren Buffett, Billionaire

The big business counteroffensive continues to this day. The banking crisis of 2008-09 was but the latest strategy for imposing a “new normal” so that “big business can have more.”

The banking collapse of 2008-09 was a deliberate attack on the working people of this country and Europe.

The banking collapse of 2008-09 was a deliberate attack on the working people of this country and Europe. It was designed to create a massive crisis to justify “austerity” for the masses. This is what Naomi Klein has styled

“disaster capitalism” at its most perverse. Bankers and governments created this huge disaster to undermine state budgets and Social Security and Medicare in the US and dismantle the generous social programs in Europe that strengthen the working class there. The goal is to leave workers unprotected in the face of raw corporate power.

The looting by bankers and insurance companies of the US Treasury has been on a scale wholly without precedent. The combined Bush and Obama bailouts of banks, insurers, and auto makers were estimated in July 2009 by Neil Barofsky, Special Inspector General of the Troubled Asset Relief Program, to total \$23.7 trillion dollars. Generations of Americans will be impoverished to pay off these debts.

Is Human Nature the Problem?

What are most people really after? What motivates us? These are critical questions. The answer to them determines what kind of society is possible.

Years ago an elderly woman said to one of us, “Most people are good people. All our friends are. But then along comes a Greedy Gus who spoils everything.”

Greedy Gusses want to grab more than their share. They have no care for others. Most people aren’t like

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that. Common sense and common decency are just that: traits that people have in common. Most people would never engage in the behavior of corporate CEOs and bankers and politicians. Murder a million and a half Iraqis to get their oil and to justify the Pentagon budget? Ordinary decent people would never do these things. They have to be fed constant lies and horror stories to let the government get away with these wars. Ironically, it's the fact that most people find such behavior completely unacceptable that makes them vulnerable to the politicians' lies. They would never do anything so evil themselves, so they find it hard to believe anyone else would.

What kind of people would dump toxic chemicals into a town water supply? What sorts of people would drill through 18,000 feet of sea floor under 5,000 feet of seawater in the Gulf of Mexico and ignore basic safety requirements, resulting in the worst environmental catastrophe in history? BP[§] was engaging in the kind of behavior that corporations engage in every day—behavior that normal people find unacceptable and actually incredible; they are hard put to believe that anyone would knowingly do it.

There is a vast chasm between the values of most people and the values of the ruling class—the Greedy Gusses—who run the world. Warren Buffet, the billionaire “Sage of Omaha,” was right when he said that there is a class war and his side is winning. And his side, the side of the rich and powerful, has rotten values.

The class war pits the people who do the work that makes human society possible—the electricians and teachers, the nurses and auto workers and IT folks, the carpenters and doctors and ironworkers and secretaries and waiters—against corporate CEOs and bank executives and capitalists who reap the rewards

[§] BP and Goldman Sachs, with help from President Obama, dramatically lowered the years of life expectancy of people in the Gulf Coast region just to make a buck, as reported here:
<http://www.newswithviews.com/Hodges/dave111.htm>

of that labor. The super-rich have grabbed most of the treasures of the earth and the fruits of our labor for themselves.

But the class war is about far more than money. It's also about values: the way we relate to each other and to the earth and future generations. The class war is a struggle over how we should live and what it means to be a human being.

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Most people have very different values from the class that runs society. Most believe in solidarity—people supporting each other. They believe in people having their fair share and no more. They believe in people having their say in the

decisions that affect their lives.

The ruling elite believe the opposite. They believe in competition and getting more than the other guy. They believe in inequality. They think there should be a few super-rich and powerful and that most people should be their slaves, and they work mighty hard to make it that way. More than anything they hate democracy—not the lying, fake democracy we have now but real democracy where ordinary people make the important decisions. Within corporations there is no pretense of democracy or equality. Corporations are dictatorships. You abandon all hope of democratic rights when you punch in. Outside the confines of the corporation—that is, in corporate society—the ruling class makes a pretense of democracy and tries to paper over its real values. But beneath the facade, corporate society is a dictatorship. Laws are designed to promote and protect corporate power. The formidable powers of the government—police, the Courts, the military—are arrayed on the side of the bankers and corporations to enforce their laws.

Why are there so many deeply ugly goings-on in our society? Because we live in a dictatorship of the rich.

The class war is a conflict over what values should shape society, what goals it should pursue, and who should control it. This war goes on in every part of our lives. It affects how we feel about ourselves,

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how we relate to each other at home, to our friends, to our community. It affects how we are treated at work and how our children are treated at school. It affects whether we live in a state of contrived, constant warfare with people of other lands or faiths, whether our environment is completely destroyed on the altar of profit, whether we have a future at all.

Class conflict is the central fact in our society. It lies at the heart of our problems. To solve our problems, we have to win the class war. Revolution means overthrowing the government of the rich and creating a society where the people who do the real work of society have the power. It means destroying the present structure of power and establishing a real democracy.

Why Democratic Revolution Is Necessary

The present civilization is based on a paradigm in which the economy must constantly expand, turning ever more of the earth and human interactions into commodities to sell. In this economy working people are merely consumers or expendable producers. The natural world is used by the powerful as if it were a limitless source of private riches and a garbage dump. As the oceans die, the fisheries disappear, the environment is ravaged, clean water is fouled, fossil fuels grow scarce, the message becomes unavoidable. Civilization based on this paradigm is not sustainable. We cannot go on this way.

There remain only two alternatives open to us: either be sucked ever deeper into a vortex of war, tyranny, suffering, and mass liquidation—the planned die-off of “excess” populations in societies that cannot be sustained—or make a fresh start, rebuilding society on a fundamentally different model.

We are proposing a new basis for organizing human society, in which human beings will relate to Nature and to each other as caretakers, not exploiters. We will produce food and shelter and goods, but not to serve a profit machine that creates false needs in those with money and exploits and starves those without money. Instead we will produce social wealth to serve real human needs. We will safeguard

the earth as a sacred trust held on behalf of future generations.

*We live in a dictatorship of
the rich.*

Even if civilization were not at this critical stage, revolution would still be necessary. We are confronted with the same ugly facts that have confronted human beings in class societies over the centuries. A world of gross inequality, of privilege for the few and misery for the many, of brutal wars and savage exploitation to satisfy the lusts of a few for money and power is intolerable to us because it violates our idea of what human life should be like. We can fulfill our desires for a fully human world only by creating a new society.

Capitalism is anti-human. It can only maintain its control by attacking those things about us which are most human, our understanding of ourselves and each other and our connections with other human beings. Capital must attack our natural impulses for solidarity and love for our fellow beings, lest we combine against it. It must undermine our self-confidence, lest we try to rise above our place. It must constantly lie to us, lest we understand and challenge its policies. It must keep us frightened of a foreign enemy, lest we identify the real class enemy at home. It must make us feel alone, lest we sense our collective power. We can only fulfill ourselves as human beings and achieve the world we desire by overturning this one.

Hopes of reforming the system are sheer illusion. Without revolution, whatever victories we may win can only be temporary. If we stop one war they will start another. If we win better wages in one plant they will outsource the work to another. Revolution is the only way to escape the treadmill of defeat.

Why We Can Win

Many people see revolution as necessary, but few think it's possible. Why do we think revolution is possible? The answer to this question brings us back to one's view of what people are after.

We know that the capitalist system is the most powerful social system that has ever existed. The basic principle of capitalism is profit and self-interest:

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dog-eat-dog competition. We should each be trying to screw each other all the time. But we can see that this is not so. Most of us in our everyday lives—with our wives or husbands or children, our friends or neighbors or co-workers, our students or patients—try to establish relationships based on love and mutual support and fairness. We try to create relationships that are the opposite of capitalist relations. It's true that we don't always succeed in creating supportive relationships—we live in a very screwed-up world where we are constantly told to just look out for Number One—but to the extent that we have any good relationships in our lives, we have created them in spite of a powerful culture profoundly hostile to them.

This means that most people are already engaged in a struggle against capitalism and its values. People's everyday lives have revolutionary meaning. Our acts of kindness to family, friends, and neighbors are part of the effort to shape the world with humane values. The most personal acts of kindness are on a continuum of human effort with the most public, collective acts of mass revolutionary struggle.

Revolution is possible because a world-wide revolutionary movement already exists in people's lives. But this everyday struggle is invisible to conventional views of politics, left and right. Part of building a revolutionary movement is bringing this inspiring struggle to light so that each of us can see that we are not alone in our aspirations for a new world. We are already part of a vast movement.

This movement remains hidden until people find new confidence in themselves and each other, as they have recently in Egypt and elsewhere in the Middle East, and as they did worldwide in the 1960s. As people grow more confident, they expand their sense of how much of the world they can change. They reach out to each other to discuss their goals and experiences. They build informal support and communication networks. As they gain more confidence, they build movements and challenge the authorities. When they develop enough awareness of their power and strong enough connections, they make revolutions.

The Driving Force of History

Why has this struggle of ordinary people for a better world not already succeeded? Actually it has succeeded in important ways. It got us to where we are now. We would still be serfs or slaves in the Dark Ages, our lives controlled by Church and King, if not for this struggle. All social advances throughout history, such as the abolition of slavery and serfdom, came about through the struggle of ordinary people for a better world.

But the many rebellions and revolutions in history have never completely swept away the old elites and the ideas on which their power depended, so that ordinary people's revolutionary vision of a free and equal society of mutual aid, in which "the Earth [would be] a Common Treasure House for all," as Gerrard Winstanley, a farm

laborer, wrote in 1649, has never been realized. Ordinary people have never been fully conscious that it is they and not "their betters" who are the source of a better world. The result is that reforms and revolutions have always been turned by ruling elites into more sophisticated ways of dominating people.

History has thus been a long process of two steps forward, one step back. People broke the bonds of serfdom and chattel slavery only to be enslaved by capitalism. They organized unions to fight the factory owners, only to see the unions become tools of management. They created governments that called themselves democratic, only to find that the real power remained in the hands of the rich. They won the vote for propertyless white males and women and black people, only to find that the electoral process is trickery. They invented new technologies to make life easier, only to find the machines used against them. As long as the ruling elite hold state power, and as long as elitist ideas prevail, the rulers will turn every reform and every new product of human intelligence into new chains to bind us.

Elites have succeeded in subverting the revolutionary struggle precisely because the meaning of their struggle has been hidden from people. We are trained to think that the good things flow from the top of society: not only material wealth and the great works of civilization but also moral vision and vir-

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tue. The leaders of corporations and universities and churches, the members of Congress and the Courts, are reputed to be the wisest and most intelligent in the land. We are trained to think of society as a meritocracy; those at the top are our betters, no matter how much blood is on their hands. The force for revolution today is the same force that has produced all the revolutions of the past. We can only succeed at overturning this morally bankrupt social order when we understand that ordinary working people, not elites, are the source of a new world as well as of the good in this one.

What Will the New Society Be Like?

Democratic revolution is the only practical solution for a society being strangled by tyranny and greed. Our goal is a society refreshed by the initiative, intelligence, and energy of people who finally have real power over their lives.

What follows aims to provide enough detail about how we think the principles of mutual aid, equality, and democracy would play out in practice to enable you to “fill in the gaps” with your own imagination. Of course we can only propose ideas for a future society, which would surely be the ever-developing product of the imagination, experience, and trials and errors of millions of people.

Here are some of its important features.

Equality

In the United States, two percent of U.S. wealth holders own 54 percent of all net financial assets, while more than half of families have no financial assets, or owe more than they own. One percent of the U.S. population owns sixty percent of the stock and forty percent of the total wealth. The richest 1% of adults in the world owned 40% of the world’s total assets in the year 2000 while the bottom half of the world adult population owned only 1% of global wealth. This grotesque situation must end.

We propose a new society in which all who contribute to society (including, of course, those not expected to contribute, such as children, and people who are retired, disabled or otherwise unable to contribute) have free and equal access to its goods and services. There are no poor people and no rich people. Janitors and physicians, Ph.D.s and those with just a high school education, airplane pilots and auto mechanics, all are allowed to take things from stores and use services for free when these things are plentiful, or to have equal access according to need to things that are scarce and therefore rationed. The children of a janitor enjoy the same standards of education, healthy food, quality health care, comfortable living space, quality clothing, leisure time, fun vacations, healthy and attractive environment, as the children of a doctor. The principle of this economic system can be expressed as, ‘From each according to ability, to each according to need.’

Equality, in our view, is essential to human liberation. By “equality” we do not mean “equal opportunity” to become richer than other people and rise to the top of an unequal society. We mean equality of condition, where everyone who contributes to society has equal access to the amazing wealth that human effort and ingenuity produce: equal access to food and shelter and leisure, equal access to education, healthcare and family security, equal standing in decision-making.

Equality is a necessary condition of satisfying social relationships and real personal freedom. In the present society, human relationships are distorted by needless conflict based on class and competition. Human abilities are undermined, held in check, or diverted toward the perverse needs of the profit system and its masters. The aim of democratic revolution is to create a classless society, in which collective human relationships can fully flourish, and in which each individual’s abilities find their full development. The capabilities of the billions of people whose talents and intelligence have been suppressed by a system that has no use for them will burst forth in an astonishing revelation of what great gifts have lain unused.

Democracy cannot exist where some people are entitled to more than others. With superior entitlement

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comes superior power; if some people are “more equal” than others, the more equal will contrive to gain more privileges and special treatment. Pretty soon they’d be running the show—as in *Animal Farm*, or in the late, unlamented Soviet Union, or as they do now in the U.S.

The astonishing fact is that most of the problems that can make life hell for ordinary people are imposed on us to maintain inequality. War, unemployment, grinding poverty, lost pensions, social insecurity: things that are problems for us are solutions for the ruling class to the problem of how to control us. The “superior class”—the people who now own the banks and Big Business and the government—need unemployment to keep people in line, and so they send jobs overseas and create unemployment. They need wars to frighten us with supposed enemies and to support defense contractors, and so they make wars. They need to steal our pensions, to make our Golden Years a source of nightmare-inducing fear, and so they steal our pensions and our health care and our homes. Our problems are not a natural or inevitable part of human society. They are policies designed to divide and intimidate us. They are the necessary pillars of a society based on inequality.

Inequality can be eliminated because it is in fact an unnatural condition. This might sound like a truth-defying statement. After all, hasn’t society been unequal since Time Immemorial? Even the Bible says, “The poor you shall always have with you.” What the Bible doesn’t mention is what a gigantic effort it takes for the rich to keep people poor.

Nearly every aspect of life in America is organized to justify and enforce inequality. Human beings are conditioned from the cradle to the grave to accept inequality as the natural condition of human society and accept their place in society as right. Inequality is maintained only at great human cost: by undermining the self-confidence, underutilizing the intelligence, under-developing the talents of the great majority of human beings, to get them to internalize their status.

The education system, for example, is designed to reinforce competition, docile acceptance of authority, and social inequality. In spite of the best ef-

forts of teachers, the schools undermine the self-confidence of working class children, often making them feel stupid and unworthy, even as they make the children of the wealthy and a select few among the middle class feel capable of great things.

The schools convey these messages in various ways, some of them subtle, some not. Schools without textbooks or toilet paper or enough desks or enough teachers are telling children to expect little from themselves or life. Since school funding in the U.S. is based mainly on local property taxes, children in wealthy school districts always get more of everything. In school as in life, them that has, gets.

*Our young people
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Unequal expectations for young people are also conveyed in subtle ways. Many education policies and practices are designed to reinforce class inequality. For example, U.S. students now have to pass “high stakes” tests at various grade levels to pass on to the

next grade and to receive a high school diploma. These standardized tests are “norm-referenced”; that is, they are designed to produce a range of test scores so that, no matter how well students have learned the classroom material, a large percentage will do poorly on the test. Since so much depends on them, these tests create a climate of fear in the classroom. Education in poorer districts has been reduced to mere test preparation. The tests work directly against teachers’ efforts to encourage self-confidence and critical-thinking in their students and engage them with interesting material.

Why are such destructive policies imposed on the schools? Our young people have more intelligence than the capitalist system can use. As millions of jobs disappear overseas, and as society becomes more unequal and less democratic, the expectations of many young people must be quashed, so that if they end up with only a low-paying job or no job at all, they will blame themselves instead of the system.^{**}

Work too is organized to deprive people of their skills and make their intelligence lie unused. Fred-

^{**} For more on education, see Dave Stratman, “You’ll Never Be Good Enough: Schooling and Social Control” (<http://www.newdemocracyworld.org/old/control.htm>).

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erick Taylor, the inventor of “scientific management,” advised factory owners that workers would have power on the shop floor as long as work skills and knowledge of production processes remained in their hands. Taylor encouraged management to learn the work processes, encode these processes in machinery or tools (now software too), and break the work into many small parts. Workers’ jobs would be reduced to trivial tasks requiring a minimum of skill and no understanding of the work being done. Only management would understand work processes overall. Workers would become cheap and easily replaceable parts in an overall process that they no longer understood.

The reason so many jobs are boring and meaningless is that they are meant to be that way. The problem is not only that most work is toward a trivial end—making money for the owners. Most work in capitalist society has been sucked dry of human ingenuity and interest to control the workforce.

The corporate media play a key support role in this massive theft of people’s sense of self-confidence and understanding how the world works. Nobody needs to be told that we are fed a constant stream of misinformation by the media and constantly diverted by celebrity gossip and sports and clownish politicians from the issues we need to understand. The point is that the constant stream of crap from the corporate media fits seamlessly with the education system and working life into a 24/7 system aimed at undermining people’s understanding of their actual experience.

It is true that people resist these assaults in a multitude of ways. People are deeply skeptical of government and corporate officialdom and of corporate media. Teachers and students and parents reject the corporatization of education and resist it in the ways they feel able. Workers try to find ways to resist management with solidarity and to cope with stultifying jobs. As we have already seen, most people in their everyday lives forge relationships that resist capitalist values. But people’s struggles at school and work and elsewhere are now only defensive struggles. They by no means tap people’s full potential as makers of a new world.

When we say that the revolution will change how we live, we mean that the institutions of society that now function to suppress and distort the development of human beings will be turned on their head. Schools will not work to impose inequality. Instead teachers and students and parents will transform education into a liberating and exciting experience. Workers will transform work into a humanly satisfying and intellectually rewarding activity. The people will run the media to spread human equality and truth.

Equality and Mutual Aid

Equality is essential to any society that takes seriously the Golden Rule, “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” The Golden Rule stems from the heart of what it means to be human. With revolutionary democracy we can build a society that reinforces and reflects the best of human nature. We can create a paradise.

*Equality is essential
to any society that takes seriously
the Golden Rule.*

Human beings are a social species. We cannot survive as lone individuals because our bodies and minds are not made for it. The way we survive on earth is by cooperation with each other: mutual aid. We go beyond mere survival to create comforts and enjoyments and security the same way, with mutual aid.

Cooperation and mutual aid are the source of the material and emotional well-being in society. This cooperation requires trust among people. Treating others as you would like to be treated is a behavior pattern that makes it possible for human beings to survive and thrive. An intuitive understanding of the Golden Rule is part of our very makeup as human beings, as important for our survival as our opposable thumb and large brain. Only in a society based on this principle will people have maximum trust in one another.

When a society is not based on economic equality, the Golden Rule is broken: there is less trust, less cooperation and mutual aid, and hence less material and less emotional well being for all. The more unequal a society, the more anxious people feel about their place in the hierarchy of wealth. The more

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equal and supportive a society, the more happy and fulfilled people can be.

Making society economically equal will improve the lives not only of the poorest but also of many people who are financially better off than most people today. Professionals, intellectuals, managers and small business owners will all benefit.

They will not bear the constant stress of scrambling to save for their children's education or their own retirement or "keeping up with the Joneses." Their marriages will not break up over disputes about money, the leading cause of divorce today.

They will wake up each morning in a world where people trust each other and are friendly towards each other. It will no longer be a world of Orwellian wars of social control designed to make us live in fear of other people.

They will no longer feel threatened by the good fortune and creativity of others, as is the case today when every business owner must fear his competitor.

Managers will no longer experience work as battling with workers under their supervision. They will not experience social isolation, but will be part of a group of equals working toward a common purpose.

Should Physicians Be Paid More Than Janitors?

Equal living standards for all, including doctors and janitors, go to the heart of creating a better society. The aim of the pecking order of pay and status in our society is to divide workers and convince people to feel better and more deserving than all those slightly lower in the pecking order and respectful and supportive of all those higher up. Pay differentials are meant to recruit people to the capitalist team.

So should a janitor have the same standard of living as a doctor, and the same right to participate in workplace decisions? Here is why we think so.

In the new society, the usual arguments for higher pay for physicians would not hold water. Medical training would be free, eliminating one argument for higher physician pay.

But even in today's society the argument that physicians deserve higher pay because of the sacrifice they must make does not hold up. The education and training of a doctor are largely a function of the status of the family into which a doctor-to-be is born. Few doctors are born to low-status families, just as few janitors are born to high status families. (This is not a function of so-called intelligence. Those SAT scores etched in our brains correlate with nothing so much as the economic status of our families.) If the Prince and the Pauper were switched at birth, how different might their lives be? Should the doctor be rewarded for his luck in being born to a high-status family, thus preserving inequality into the next generation?

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Then too, the doctor's rigorous education and training represent an opportunity for intellectual and personal development accorded

relatively few people in our society. A physician takes on considerable responsibilities, but this is one of the benefits of being a physician. The profession of medical doctor carries with it its own incentives, irrespective of status and pay. Which would you rather be, a doctor or a janitor?

What about the argument that the demand for physicians, unlike janitors, exceeds the supply? The reason physicians are relatively scarce today is because our unequal economy is not based on providing for the needs of everybody, but rather on providing for the needs of those who can afford the price. Physicians, good schools, and many other things are kept artificially scarce for this reason, and also for the purpose of social control. The rulers use artificial scarcity to make people feel insecure and to make them compete against each other for things in short supply. In a society organized on new principles, we would not have this problem.

What about the argument that a physician's skills are more valuable to society than a janitor's? This argument suggests that the doctor accomplishes her health miracles by herself. But medical schools and hospitals could not function without the janitors who contribute to the hygienic cleanliness of the hospital, or the carpenters and masons and electricians and plumbers and sheet metal workers and all the other construction workers who build the hospital and medical school, or the nurses and orderlies and

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cooks without whom a hospital cannot care for the sick, or the farmers and agricultural workers who grow and harvest the food all the others need to be able to do their various jobs, and the list goes on and on. Without all of these other people doing their jobs, there would be no physicians.

Do The Rich Deserve Their Wealth?

Capitalists are able to get rich by paying their employees less than the value their employees produce. This is exploitation, and it is at the heart of every job created by a capitalist. Except for the self-employed and the very rich, everybody is forced to accept such a job in order to live. Capitalists justify this exploitation on the grounds that they own the means of production—the land, factories, shops, offices and mines required to produce things, without which workers cannot produce anything. Thus business owners act as if they are doing us a favor by “providing jobs”—i.e., exploiting workers.

Why do capitalists now own the means of production? Because we live in a very upside down world, with a very unnatural arrangement of things—an arrangement we have grown so used to that it now seems natural. The land, the earth’s natural resources, and the factories and mines and buildings that millions of human beings labored to create—in other words, the means of producing the wealth of society—these things rightfully belong to all of society, but we have been dispossessed of what is rightfully ours.

When were we dispossessed of our common ownership of the land? It began a very long time ago. Humans did not evolve as two species, one to own the land but not work and the other to work but not own the land; people held the land in common. As Native Americans expressed it, “The land owned us.” But thousands of years ago some ruthless people established themselves as an upper class, took the common lands from the people, and subjugated them as peasants and serfs, whom the upper class claimed to own along with the land. The upper class also made many people literally slaves. These peasants, serfs, and slaves are the ancestors of today’s working class.

Powerful elites have continued to seize “the commons”—lands or property held for the common use of all—for their private use and enrichment over the centuries. As capitalism emerged in Europe around the sixteenth and seventeenth century, aristocratic landowners drove peasants off the land in mass evictions (known as “enclosures”). Evicted from the commons, people were forced to work for wages in the “dark, Satanic mills” springing up around England. The British Parliament passed repeated Enclosure Acts through the 19th century. Colonialism in the New World, the Middle East, and Africa was nothing if not the seizure of vast riches—minerals, gold, diamonds, oil, and the land itself—from indigenous peoples by powerful elites of colonizing countries.

Under the new name of “privatization,” the theft of publicly-owned resources like water, minerals, telephone exchanges and public transportation systems in countries from England to South Africa to South America continues to this day. In the 1970s Margaret Thatcher privatized public transport and public housing in England. In Bolivia the government gave the La Paz water supply to a French corporation in 1997, and in 1999 gave the Cochabamba water supply to a subsidiary of Bechtel.

Seizure of public wealth by the powerful few is central to American history, from the earliest seizure of Native American lands (along with the destruction of Native peoples) to the grant by Congress of huge tracts of land to railroad magnates, to the granting of oil leases to companies which then destroy the common environment—think BP. The seizure of slaves in Africa constituted the seizure of human beings for private wealth.

Private seizure of public wealth is now reaching unheard of levels. Americans are just beginning to feel the real effects of the Mother of All Privatizations, when in 2008-09 the federal government transferred \$24 trillion in public wealth to private Wall Street bankers and insurers. Cities and states are selling valuable public resources—such as all the receipts of all Chicago parking meters for the next thirty years—to private investors. At this writing (summer 2011), French and German banks are seizing Greek

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public resources—ports, bridges, even entire islands—in part payment for fraudulent loans.

This centuries-long history of theft, carried out sometimes by legal chicanery, sometimes by violent seizure, is what has made and continues to shape the world we live in today. It appears normal only because we were born into it and we are surrounded by propaganda that tells us this system of “property rights” is right and natural. We were all once equal co-owners of the means of creating our livelihoods and our society, but now the rich expect us to aspire merely to be wage-slaves.

Balzac said, “Behind every great fortune there is a great crime.” It’s not difficult to see the crimes behind the bloody history of enclosures and colonialism and privatization. But what about someone like Bill Gates? Surely he’s an exception to Balzac’s dictum.

Gates, the richest man in the world, is apparently some kind of geek saint. At least according to the media, he earned his billions with sheer brain-power and is using them to benefit us by employing thousands of people and by making charitable donations. We’re told that the reason Gates is many times richer than most Americans is because he worked many times harder or smarter than they did. But did Bill Gates write the Microsoft code alone? Did he build the buildings where the software developers worked, grow the food they ate, teach them how to read and write and create software?

Gates has managed to get his hands on a world-class treasure, but it is a treasure created by uncountable hands working collectively to do a million things needful for creating human society. Did he come up with some brainy ideas? Yes. Did he come up with his ideas all by himself, as if he were raised by wolves? Obviously not. His intellectual contributions, however great or small they may have been, reflect small steps forward on paths laid out and trod by others working in societies on which they, like he, were dependent. Could software development have taken any different paths? Ask the many creators of Linux and other Freeware, who see the Internet precisely as “The Commons,” owned by all, and

who resist its exploitation and privatization by individuals for their own enrichment.

Gates’ great wealth is a product of society, and it has been appropriated by a single individual. By what right does Bill Gates or anyone else claim to own privately the wealth that was produced by so many?

*Balzac said,
“Behind every great fortune
there is a great crime.”*

Based on his stolen wealth, Bill Gates sets himself up as a kind of king who decides on his own (with his “philanthropic” foundations) how our schools should be run and how our society should

respond to diseases around the world. Bill Gates treats all of us as his “hired hands” while he makes key decisions about social policy that should be made democratically by all of us as equals. None of Gates’ philanthropic decisions, by the way, involve making society more equal or democratic.

In the good society, nobody will make a fortune in business. The wealth created by society will belong to all of us equally, to enrich all our lives. Jobs, in the good sense of the word, will be plentiful, and rich business owners will be a thing of the past.

Is it True That People Only Work Hard to Rise Above Others?

Some say that society needs to provide some people higher standards of living than others because people will not do excellent work or make the great effort required to learn socially valuable skills (such as medicine or piloting a jet plane) unless the reward for doing so is a higher standard of living than most other people.

But many people enjoy learning socially useful skills for reasons having nothing to do with the higher pay they receive. The best doctors love making other people’s lives better with their knowledge and skills. Jonas Salk did not patent his polio vaccine or earn any money from it. Good pilots love flying. Carpenters love being very good at what they do. There is a non-monetary reward that people crave: the satisfaction of knowing that they are doing something important that improves the lives of others, that they are doing it skillfully, and that they are admired by others in society for what they do. This is one reason why people would learn skills in the new society.

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It is true that people today work hard and learn skills in order to earn more money than they would otherwise. But this is not the same thing as wanting to be richer than other people. To see that this is so, consider what would happen if the typical person who works hard to earn more money in order to have a higher standard of living knew that, as a result of his hard work, everybody else would also enjoy the same higher standard of living. Would he say, “Well, in that case I have no motive for doing the hard work?” Improving one’s own life along with the lives of others is a powerful motive for doing work and learning new skills.

History demonstrates this is true. From 1936 to 1939 in nearly half of Spain, workers and peasants made a social revolution and for a few years successfully defended themselves against General Franco’s and Hitler’s forces. Their revolution included more than three million peasants taking over control of the land from the former large landowners and creating more than 1200 voluntary collectives based on economic equality among all of the workers.

This revolution was led by anarchist peasants and workers. Some collectives abolished money altogether. Others took steps to eliminate inequality that could result from some having more money than others; they paid people a “family wage” that was larger for people with larger families to support, and they made the most important things such as homes and food and medical care free.

In the village of Magdalena de Pulpis a visitor asked a resident, “How do you organize without money? Do you use barter, a coupon book, or anything else?” He replied, “Nothing. Everyone works and everyone has a right to what he needs free of charge. He simply goes to the store where provisions and all other necessities are supplied. Everything is distributed free with only a notation of what he took.”

If only inequality motivates people to work, the Spanish Revolution should have resulted in an economic disaster. But quite the opposite happened. Agricultural and industrial output increased, despite the need to send many men as soldiers to the frontlines against the Fascist military forces.

An illustration of how people work together when there is economic equality is this anecdote reported

after the defeat of the revolution in a book published in 1968 in Spain, during the rule of General Franco. During the revolution peasants collectivized the land properties of Count Romanones:

“The peasants altered the topography of the district by diverting the course of the river to irrigate new land, thus tremendously increasing cultivated areas. They constructed a mill, schools, collective dining halls, and new housing for the collectivists. A few days after the close of the Civil War, Count Romanones reclaimed his domains, expecting the worst, certain that the revolutionary vandals had totally ruined his property. He was amazed to behold the wonderful improvements made by the departed peasant collectivists. When asked their names, the Count was told that the work was performed by the peasants in line with plans drawn up by a member of the CNT Building Workers’ Union, Gomez Abril, an excellent organizer chosen by the Regional Peasant Federation. As soon as Abril finished his work he left and the peasants continued to manage the collective. Learning that Gomez Abril was jailed in Guadalajara and that he was in a very precarious situation, the count succeeded in securing his release from jail and offered to appoint him manager of all his properties. Gomez declined, explaining that a page of history had been written and his work finished.”^{††}

Abolition of Money

“Money is a new form of slavery, and distinguishable from the old simply by the fact that it is impersonal—that there is no human relation between master and slave.”

—Leo Tolstoy, Russian writer

^{††} These accounts of Spanish history are from *The Anarchist Collectives* (see Suggested Readings), p. 71, 73, 150.

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“It is well enough that people of the nation do not understand our banking and money system, for if they did, I believe there would be a revolution before tomorrow morning.”

—Henry Ford, founder, Ford Motor Company

Perhaps the most surprising feature of the new society is that money is abolished. Why is this necessary and how does it make sense?

The economy of revolutionary democracy is based on the principle of “From each according to ability, to each according to need.” It is a “Contribute what you can and take what you need” economy, not a “If you give me this I will give you that” economy. This means people share things rather than exchange them. Money, which is a means of exchanging things more conveniently than barter, is therefore not necessary in the new society.

Furthermore, buying and selling is not an equitable way for the wealth of society to be distributed. Goods ought to be shared on the basis of need. If someone who contributes to society is in need of food or shelter, he should receive them, whether he has money or not. (Most homeless in the U.S. are full-time workers whose jobs pay too little to afford them a home.) If somebody is sick and needs care, it is immoral that he should only receive as much health care as he can buy. The Golden Rule is to share, not buy and sell.

Money may not be necessary in a good society but it is, however, extremely important for a society based on inequality. In a society based on money a single individual can accumulate a great deal of money and use it to buy many things and pay many people, and thus control the use of things and the behavior of people on a vastly greater scale than would otherwise be possible.

Money thus makes inequality easy to impose because it makes it easy to concentrate power in the hands of a few, even in a society like ours today that purports to be a democracy. Money enables wealthy people to buy the votes of politicians, make laws to benefit themselves at the cost of society and sway public opinion through their corporate media. A so-

ciety based on money is incompatible with genuine democracy and equality.

On the surface it might seem that without money there would be no way to accumulate capital for investing in new enterprises. But if we look closely at what “capital” is, we see that capital accumulation for new enterprises does not require money in a society based on sharing.

*A society based on money
enables the few who are wealthy
to control the many who are not.*

Today, when a businessman wants to start a new enterprise, he needs money to buy or rent the necessary equipment and to pay wages for the necessary labor. In the new society, when people decide to start a new enterprise and the larger society democratically approves of it, then the people who carry out the enterprise may freely use the required land and natural resources and machinery, and the workers may freely take what they need to live on. The point is that in a money-based society, money is indeed important, but in a moneyless society it is not.

There remain two additional major reasons for not using money: money is an instrument of elite social control, and money poisons social relationships.

Money Is an Instrument of Elite Social Control

In an earlier time in America, the rich landowner or bank would extend credit to the tenant or farmer for seeds and fertilizer and food to sustain his family till harvest. At harvest the farmer would often find that his debt combined with the interest owed exceeded the value of his crop; with each passing year he would sink further into debt-peonage. In current times in the United States, a young person graduates from college saddled with gigantic loans, which by law he can never escape, not even through personal bankruptcy. He is in debt-peonage to the bank. He is forced by his debt to seek out the highest paying job he can find, no matter what career he would prefer. Economic pressures make him work at an unfulfilling job for a boss he may despise. The more successful he is at finding that high-paying job, the more pressure he is under to conform to capitalist values and keep his mouth shut.

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At the same time his parents may carry a mortgage on a home worth perhaps half of what they paid for it. They are in debt peonage to the bank. Someone with a car loan or needing health insurance is under similar pressure to find and keep a job and make the daily compromises necessary to stay employed in a corporate dictatorship. Young people under economic stress join the military and are trained to kill their class brothers and sisters on command. As the rulers crank up the economic pressure on families, more parents are forced to work two or three jobs and barely have time to share with their children. Money reduces life to a rat race.

The banks gain and exercise their power in society through the power of money. The power of the banks looms over all our life-choices. They hold our lives in their hands. A society based on money enables the few who are wealthy to control the many who are not.

Money Poisons Social Relationships

In a society based on money, many human interactions are mediated by money, with one person using money to exert power over another. The more money plays a role in society, the less of a role is played by the Golden Rule: moral persuasion, mutual agreement, or reciprocity of good deeds among equals. Money suppresses the role of positive human values and replaces it with greed and domination.

In a money society, money confers on its possessor an almost magical power. If the owners of a corporation want a manager to fire long time employees in order to increase profits, they just pay the manager to do the nasty deed. No need to persuade the manager that it is a morally good thing to do. The owners of the corporation have a perverse power over the manager.

In the absence of money, social power comes from one's ability to persuade others that doing this or that is morally right or at least that it benefits them. It also comes from having relationships of mutual support: because one has helped others in the past, they want to return the favor. In the absence of money, social power is not power over people but power

to act with people to accomplish goals that are shared.

It has long been said that the love of money is the root of all evil. Only in the absence of the power of money will people's moral feelings and their best values truly shape society.

Local Power Trumps Every Other Power

Yet another novel aspect of the new society is that people in democratic local community and workplace assemblies are the only ones who can make and enforce laws—there are no higher lawmaking bodies. Why is this important?

Two factors undermine democracy in our present society. One is that the legal structure is dominated by the capitalist economic system and serves that system. Some American towns are very democratic in that all citizens may vote at "town hall" meetings where laws are made. But they cannot pass laws that infringe on the property rights of the corporations, no matter how beneficial those laws may be.

The other factor is that state and federal laws are made by politicians in capital cities quite distant from the people they supposedly represent. When people are forced to obey laws made by people in a distant state or capital, they inevitably have little say in the decisions that concern them, no matter how "democratically" the distant lawmakers are selected.

For true democracy to prevail, it is necessary to abolish both the capitalist system and the power of distant political bodies to make laws. Order in society must come from voluntary federation, not from centralized top-down control. Laws must only be made locally. Without this understanding of democracy, anti-democratic regimes could claim, as today, to be "democratic" just because they allow elections.

*Buying and selling
is not an equitable way
for the wealth of society to be distributed.*

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How Does the New Society Work?

Some Things Are the Same

The key difference between the new and the old societies is the decision-making process: Who decides and on what basis?

Before looking at what is different in the new society, let's see what is the same.

One should assume that things would look very similar to how they look today. All of the things that are economically useful or desirable would probably still be around: farms and mines and factories large and small, roads and railroads and ships and airports, trucks and cars and public transportation (or whatever people democratically decide to use for transportation in light of energy and pollution concerns), stores of various types and sizes from convenient mom-and-pop stores to department stores, and office buildings, sports arenas, theaters, restaurants, hospitals, hair salons, laundromats, small "businesses" providing everything from dog-walking services to whatever other products or services creative people can think of that are useful, residential houses and apartment buildings, schools of every sort from preschool and kindergartens to universities, scientific research institutes, television and radio stations and newspapers, art galleries, playgrounds, hotels, golf courses, etc. Some things would be missing: banks, insurance companies, pawnshops, and the chasm between rich and poor.

People would be doing the same kinds of useful work as today, driving trucks, providing health care, entertaining others, making art, growing food, harvesting timber, making jewelry and iPhones, teaching children to read and write and adults whatever they want to learn, and countless other useful things.

People's primary residence remains their personal property. There is plenty of U.S. productive power to make comfortable homes available for everyone, including the homeless and those who live in substandard housing and those who have been foreclosed on by banks. In the case of properties owned by the super-rich, there would have to be popular discussion of the proper way to distribute the wealth

of billionaire exploiters. The people will have to decide democratically.

The general principle after the revolution is that, whenever possible, consistent with the limits of a sustainable economy, people's standard of living should be leveled up, not down.

The U.S. economy today produces such gigantic wealth that much of it has to be wasted, even literally blown up. The military budget, for example, exceeds 1.2 trillion dollars per year, without counting the costs of its multiple wars; the Middle East wars have been estimated by Nobel laureate economist Joseph Stiglitz already to have cost 4 trillion dollars in direct costs and in funds committed to caring for disabled veterans. For perspective, four trillion dollars is the amount of domestic budget cuts that the Obama Administration is proposing over the next decade.

*Laws are only made
and enforced
at the local level.*

Why must so much wealth be wasted? Because, as we have seen, the ruling class learned to its horror in the 1960s that the more economically secure people feel, the more rebellious they are prepared to act. The past forty years have witnessed an enormous redistribution of wealth in the U.S., all of it upward, into the pockets of the rich. Their motive in snapping up all the wealth is not simple greed but a keen interest in controlling people by making them economically insecure. Imagine what could be done with all that wealth if there were no ruling elite.

Some Things Are Different

The difference between the new and old society lies in the reasons people do what they do. The motive won't be fear of starving, or a desire to get rich at the expense of others. One motive might be to make the lives of one's fellows better. Another might be simply to enjoy life with family and friends in a truly free society.

People will have equal rights to use the products and services of the economy and to have a say in social decisions, and they will be free to be as different from one another as they wish, both "on the job" and "after work."

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Some people will be more skilled at this than that, more inclined to do this than that, more interested in this than that. Some people will be more respected than others, informally and perhaps also formally with awards or similar honors. Competition in the fun sense, as in sports or games or contests, will continue to make life exciting and result in winners and losers, who will, however, remain economically and politically equals. Being equal does not mean being identical. But it does mean there are no special privileges or a privileged class of people.

In a good society manual workers are no longer wrongly treated as if they contributed less to society than mental workers. Furthermore the distinction between manual and mental work, and the division of people into exclusively manual workers and exclusively mental workers, is greatly reduced. Virtually all manual work naturally involves both mental and manual aspects simultaneously. Carpenters and cooks think about how to build or cook more efficiently and creatively. An American slave invented the first cotton scraper. The most regulated assembly line workers today invent ways to make their work safer. In a good society there will no longer be capitalists trying to separate the mental and manual aspects of work as a way of controlling people. People will be free to study every aspect of their work and apply their creativity to it. No longer will they fear losing their job because somebody figured out how to make the work more efficient; instead work will become easier and more enjoyable for all.

The mental aspects of manual work, involving the theory behind it and its relation to the larger society, will no longer be the concern only of exclusively mental workers. At the same time, when mental workers are no longer considered “better” than manual workers, they will be called upon to share equally in manual work that nobody wants to do.

Democracy in the New Society

In the new society there will be what we will call here community and workplace assemblies. These

are meetings open to all the adults in a given community or workplace who support the principles of the revolution (mutual aid, equality and democracy). These assemblies^{**} are where all political and economic power resides. People may participate in the community assembly where they live and in the workplace assembly where they work. Every member of an assembly, regardless of educational background, gender, race or ethnicity has an equal say in decisions. Assemblies decide how to make formal policy decisions, and they may appoint committees to implement these policies, which become laws.

The policies decided upon by community assemblies apply to all people in the community, and the poli-

*Community and workplace assemblies
are where all
political and economic power resides.*

cies decided upon by workplace assemblies apply to all those who work at the given workplace. Community policies may deal with all sorts of issues such as building codes, what constitutes

contributing less than “according to one’s ability” or taking more than “according to one’s need” and how people who do that should be dealt with (if at all), what is the retirement age, and what should be done to ensure public safety. Workplace policies may deal with such matters as staffing, workflow coordination, working conditions, safety and cooperation.

^{**} Regarding the question of the size, the community (or workplace) would need to be small enough so that everybody in it who wishes to attend an assembly meeting can fit in the same room. Today many conventions take place with plenary meetings of more than 5,000 people. In a community of 40,000 people (including children) it is likely that fewer than 1 out of 8 people would attend a given community assembly meeting, which would mean 5000 or fewer people at the meeting. There is no need for all 40,000 people to know each other personally, because what the meeting does is establish general principles (i.e. laws) and appoint committees to implement them. If people wish to limit the size of a community to much smaller than 40,000 people, that would be easy to do. If a community with 40,000 people wanted to, it could consist of ten assemblies for 4,000 people each, and each meeting would consist of only around 500 people. Then these small assemblies would each send a delegate to a “regional” assembly. Even much smaller assemblies are possible.

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It is up to community assembly policies to determine the purposes for which the resources of the community will be used. (By resources we mean the means of production—large tracts of land and natural resources, buildings other than private homes, machinery and equipment and so forth, which belong to all people equally, as opposed to personal property—one’s house and car, garden, clothes, books, musical instruments etc.) Within this framework, workplace assemblies decide how to achieve these purposes, what skills are needed and what effort is expected from their members.

Workers are no longer employees working for an employer; they collectively (as members of both a community and a workplace assembly) make all of the decisions that formerly were made by the employer.

By “workplace” we don’t mean only a factory or office. A workplace assembly may consist, for example, of people who take care of children (their own and/or others, in their home or elsewhere), or fishermen or truck drivers or farmers or adult students in a school.

All members of a workplace assembly enjoy equal status with respect to decision-making in the assembly. Of course some workers will be more knowledgeable or experienced or skilled than others and their opinions may be accorded greater respect; this is natural, and perfectly compatible with all workers having equal status.

Entrepreneurship, in the positive sense of creativity and a desire to do something better than has ever been done before or produce something new that people will love, will flourish in the new society. Anybody with a good idea that makes sense to their community assembly will receive a green light (i.e., the necessary resources as well as membership in the sharing economy for the required workers) to give it a try. If it is a big success, the person who initiated it may be rewarded with greater respect and perhaps fame and honor, but not with more possessions.

Community assemblies decide how to solve social problems, such as who will do the necessary but unpleasant work, like trash collection. A community assembly might persuade some to volunteer to col-

lect the trash by requiring fewer hours of work from trash collectors than others, or specially honoring those who collect the trash. The assembly might require every able-bodied person to collect a little trash, or it might develop some previously unimagined technology to deal with trash. Now in our capitalist society, trash collectors are told, “If you want to support your family, you better pick up our trash because that’s the best job we’re going to offer people like you.” In the new society people will certainly figure out better solutions to such problems.

For planning, coordinating and distributing goods and services on a large scale, assemblies would act as a federation.

People’s participation in public and economic decision-making is by no means limited to attending assembly meetings, which might be rather large and im-

personal. Smaller groups of people who live in the same neighborhood or work together or who have something else in common and who know and trust each other would meet regularly to discuss new ideas or proposals, coordinate with other similar small groups, and bring their ideas and proposals to the full assembly. These small groups would also directly implement proposals approved by the assembly.

For planning, coordinating and distributing goods and services on a large scale, assemblies would act as a federation. Neighboring local assemblies might send delegates to a district assembly to make unified proposals for their respective assemblies to accept or reject as they see fit. District assemblies may send delegates to a county assembly who may send delegates to a state assembly, and so forth up to nation assemblies sending delegates to a world assembly. At any level from the district to the world there may be many assemblies, with different concerns ranging from economic production to sports, culture, education, scientific research, the environment and whatever else people care about.

At each level an assembly proposes policies or plans to the assemblies at the level below them. A state assembly, for example, might make a proposal for approval by its delegates’ county assemblies. If the proposal did not get sufficient approval, it would need to be modified until it did. The county assemblies would resend the proposal to their district assemblies and the process would continue until the

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proposal met with the approval of sufficient community and/or workplace assemblies to be implemented.

The negotiations and compromises that this process entails are similar to what goes on among the ruling elite today, but with some very important differences. Our elite rulers' negotiations take place in organizations like the Council on Foreign Relations, the Federal Reserve Banks, corporate boards of directors, and international elite gatherings like the annual one in Davos, Switzerland, in meetings that ordinary people are not allowed to attend. In the new society anybody who supports the principles of the revolution may attend delegate assembly meetings (although only the delegates have a formal vote).

Today our rulers decide among themselves how to dominate and exploit the rest of us, whereas in the new society people democratically decide how to help and support one another. The decisions that our rulers make today are imposed by the few on the many, either by overtly undemocratic corporate policies that employees must follow or be fired, or by state and federal laws made by so-called representatives who are in fact beholden to the upper class. In contrast, in the new society people at the local level who act in accord with the principles of the revolution are free to do as they please.

How the Sharing Economy Works

Federation makes it possible for people to implement a sharing economy on the basis of "From each according to ability, to each according to need" on a very large scale. Community assemblies democratically agree to share products and services with each other according to need, for free, with no exchange of money or bartering of goods. Products are delivered to stores, and stores make things conveniently available for people to take, not to buy. Things in short supply are rationed by whatever equitable method the appropriate assemblies choose.

When a community or workplace assembly discusses things such as what specific products to make

or services to provide, what quality to strive for, how many hours per week to work, at what age one may retire, where to deliver the product they make or to whom they will provide the service they perform, and so forth, they will decide in large part on the basis of what will seem reasonable, under the prevailing circumstances, to themselves and to all of the other people in the sharing economy. If they persist in doing something unreasonable, such as being very lazy and not producing anything themselves, or producing and freely sharing with others things that are useless or unwanted or much less important than other things that are more necessary but scarce, then they will likely end up being excluded from the larger sharing economy. If, on the other hand, they produce and freely share with others useful things or services then they will enjoy the benefits of remaining in the larger sharing economy.

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Thus the actual consequence—positive or negative as the case may be—of doing or not doing this or that kind of work acts as the self-correcting ("feedback")

mechanism in an economy based on sharing. It acts in a manner analogous to market prices in a capitalist economy. In the new economy it ensures that most people most of the time make sensible economic decisions that promote the welfare of all.

Importantly, a sharing economy based on "From each according to ability, to each according to need" does not require a centralized dictatorial government like the old Soviet Union's Communist government with its "Five Year Plans" and denial of personal freedom. The Communist method of economic decision-making, like the Communist system of government, is borne of contempt for the people and cannot work; a handful of central planners cannot possibly know needs and desires distributed among millions of people. It suppresses creativity and innovation because anything not in the central plan is prohibited. And it relies on fear and top-down control to enforce "we know better than you" central plans. Revolutionary democracy relies on the intelligence and good sense of ordinary people..

In a genuine democracy with a sharing economy, people have great personal freedom, enjoy the right to share equally in the fruits of an economy that can produce necessities and luxuries of all kinds, and

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experience the happiness that is only possible in a society in which people help each other. This is how people can at last create paradise.

How Will the Revolution Protect Itself From Its Enemies?

Democracy and Armed Suppression of Counterrevolution

This description of democracy shows how people can make decisions and laws democratically. But in order for this democracy to exist it must prevent its enemies from abolishing it, as they will surely try to do. The recent uprising in Egypt was attacked by police and the military used violence to prevent the movement from achieving its aims of making Egypt more equal and democratic. When the Fascist General Franco attempted to overthrow the liberal Republican government in Spain, workers and peasants in 1936-39 fought him while making a social revolution, using whatever arms they could obtain.

In Spain the workers and peasants formed democratic militias of armed volunteers. These soldiers elected their officers and agreed to follow military discipline under their orders. But the officers had no insignia of rank and enjoyed no special privileges.

We will surely need to organize armed forces to defend the revolution against its enemies. The experience of Spanish working people shows what to do when counterrevolutionaries mount a violent attack on the revolution. The militias in the new society are workplace assemblies of a special sort: their service is protecting the revolution from its enemies.

Not all threats to the revolution, however, necessarily take the form of a violent attack. It is possible that one or more assemblies might decide, quite democratically even, to do something that the other assemblies consider to be so counter to the principles of the revolution that it should not be permitted. For example, an assembly in a region with oil underground might try to demand enormous amounts of wealth in exchange for letting other people use the oil. Or an assembly might institute measures that are extremely abusive of children. There is no way to handle these situations other than for people to use common sense and good judgment to decide whether

and how to react. The principles of the revolution do not prohibit taking violent action when appropriate. Democracy is a way for people who agree on fundamental values to cooperate; it is not a way to resolve a fundamental conflict of values. Just as assemblies may create militias to defend against a military attack, they may also create armed bodies appropriate for responding to different threats to the revolution.

What About Prisons?

More than two million Americans are in prison today, more than one out of every hundred adults. America imprisons more of its people than any other society in the world—more than Russia, more than China, more than South Africa. This is one of the ugliest symptoms of the anti-human culture of capitalism. Most prisoners are poor and are disproportionately black or Latino. Most are guilty of victimless crimes like drug-possession. At the same time the war-criminals, mass murderers, torturers, and Wall Street psychopaths who have looted America run the government and roam free.

Would there be people in prison in the new society? There might be. In the course of suppressing violent counterrevolution, some counterrevolutionaries might have to be isolated from the populace. Even after the revolution there may be criminals who prey on people, and anti-social individuals who sabotage efforts to make a better world. Criminals may need to be segregated from the general population to ensure reasonable public safety. It will likely take a long period to eliminate from society the remnants of capitalism's anti-social culture that lead to such crimes and behaviors.

We cannot predict what decisions people would make in the new society concerning prisons. But in a society based on mutual aid and equality people would surely come up with a better approach than the one used now.

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Why Did Communist Revolutions Have Such Ugly Results?

The ugly history of 20th century Communist revolutions has convinced many people that a successful revolution is impossible. To understand why a democratic revolution can succeed, we need to understand exactly why Communist revolutions failed. Communist revolutions always impose a Party dictatorship. The question is why.

Communist revolutions are based on the theory of Marxism-Leninism. The view of human beings on which this theory is based leads inevitably to an anti-democratic outcome.

Marxism, like capitalism, sees economic development as the driving force of history and as the basis of human development. History, according to Marx, proceeds in stages, each of which is characterized by a particular level of technological development. Marx put it in one striking passage, “The handmill gives you society with the feudal lord; the steam-mill, society with the industrial capitalist.” Each stage represents progress in man’s overcoming scarcity of the things needful for human life—food, shelter, etc. Scarcity leads to the creation of classes in human society. Class society, according to Marx, controlled by a ruling elite, is necessary for economic development. The creation of a classless society depends on the productive forces of society developing to a point where scarcity is replaced by abundance. Capitalism, despite its horrors, is a progressive stage of history. In addition to producing the material abundance necessary for socialism, capitalism also produces the class which will overthrow it, the industrial proletariat. As Marx and Engels wrote in the *Communist Manifesto*, “What the bourgeoisie...produces, above all, is its own gravediggers.”

Within this “stage theory” of history, Marx accepted the capitalist view of human nature, that individuals act only in their own self-interest. For Marx, workers as individuals do not have goals beyond their individual interests; they do not act in conscious pursuit of revolutionary goals and they do not act to fulfill a vision of human life opposed to the capitalist vision.

The theory behind Communism requires anti-democratic control by the Party.

Marx theorized, however, that the self-interests of the proletariat—the working class—include the interests of all of society. As the working class liberates itself, it will liberate all of society. Marx believed with Adam Smith that the effect of the division of labor in capitalist society is that the worker “generally becomes as stupid and ignorant as it is possible for a human creature to become.” According to Marx, workers are dehumanized by capitalism. They revolt against their dehumanization to fulfill their role in history. The proletariat does not act out of any qualities that exist in real flesh-and-blood individuals. It acts out of the logic of its nature as a class. It acts, in other words, as an abstraction.

Marx’s analysis of society created a crucial problem for Lenin. If workers are dehumanized by capitalism and think only of their own self-interest, who will look to the needs of society as a whole? Lenin’s answer: the revolutionary Party, which will control society on behalf of the working class.

Thus the theory behind Communism requires anti-democratic control by the Party. Once the Communists had seized power in Russia, their practice was undemocratic as well. Even before the revolution was attacked by Western powers, the Communists dismantled the democratic institutions that workers themselves had already created, such as Workers Committees in the factories, and replaced them with “one man rule”—most often the former owner. Lenin and his Party were enthusiastic practitioners of “scientific management,” and imposed it wherever they could, further dis-empowering workers.

Based on their idea of working people as dehumanized, the Communists passed very quickly into a counterrevolutionary force. In 1921 they crushed the uprising of sailors and workers at Kronstadt, who were calling for power to be put in the hands of local democratic committees rather than the Party. When the Soviet Union intervened in the Spanish civil war in 1936-39, it attacked the revolution there, and assassinated or imprisoned many revolutionaries. At the same time, Stalin was murdering the Old Bolsheviks and condemning millions to the gulag.

Our point here is not to rehash the history of Communism but to show that its history came not from

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human nature or some inevitable nature of revolutions. It came from a very specific source: the ideas about human beings and social development on which Communism is based. It is impossible to build a democratic society on those ideas. The ideas of Marxism-Leninism inevitably lead to a Party dictatorship, as the history of the 20th century confirms.

Democratic revolution, in contrast to Communism, is based on a fundamentally different idea of human beings and social change. In this view the values of ordinary working people are precisely the values that should shape society, and ordinary people are the ones who should be in charge. Lenin thought that revolutionary consciousness consists of understanding “the laws of motion of capitalism” as an economic system, and is the province of intellectuals. We believe, on the contrary, that revolutionary consciousness consists in workers’ understanding of themselves as the source of the positive values in the present society and as the makers of a new social order based on these values.

The revolution we seek will fulfill aspirations people already embrace and values that they already practice in their everyday lives. The revolutionary vision will not come from the top of society or from intellectuals or from a revolutionary party but from the hearts and souls of the people themselves.

How Can We Make a Democratic Revolution?

In the United States in the 1890s the Populist Movement swept the American Midwest and Southwest. Dirt-poor farmers in states like Kansas and Texas and Oklahoma trained 40,000—yes, that’s forty thousand—farmers (husbands and wives) to go from farm to farm and town to town as public speakers for the movement to unite the people against the very rich whom they called a plutocracy. Their movement died when its leaders decided to support a presidential candidate instead of building a democratic revolution. We can still learn a great deal from their initial success in building a true grass-roots

movement in reaching out to hundreds of thousands of people.

While the Populist movement was mainly farmers, our movement will include all kinds of people: teachers and students in schools and colleges, workers in factories and farm laborers in fields, nurses and other health care providers in clinics and hospitals, and office workers in buildings from Wall Street to Main street. Some in the movement will have quiet conversations about democratic revolution with others at work and with friends and family and neighbors. Some will speak before larger audiences, or write articles distributed far and wide. Ideas that are clear and persuasive and answer the pressing needs of the day will spread.

We believe that even many people who, out of disgust with the government or capitalist values and culture, have joined the Tea Party or right wing religious groups, will be persuaded to join us when they see that the ideas of democratic revolution resonate with their true core values.

We also believe that soldiers and sailors can be won to support the revolutionary movement. During the Vietnam War there was widespread rebellion by soldiers and refusal to fight a war they came to see as unjust. Back then it was a conscript army while today it is a volunteer army. People enlist partly because of the lack of civilian jobs and partly because they want to help defeat the people who they have been told were the perpetrators of 9/11. Many of these volunteer soldiers, however, most famously the ex-football player, Pat Tillman, become disillusioned, disgusted and even tormented by things they have been ordered to do to Iraqi and Afghani people. More U.S. soldiers and veterans have died from suicide than from combat wounds over the past two years; in the last ten years their suicide rate was twice that of civilians. This suggests that beneath the carefully controlled media image of American troops as ardent supporters of these wars, they are deeply unhappy about them.

We need the revolutionary idea to spread so far and wide that virtually all soldiers and sailors will have a friend or a family member in the revolutionary

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movement. For the revolutionary movement to be successful, soldiers and sailors must refuse to attack it when so ordered—a very dangerous thing for a soldier or sailor to do. For this to occur, they must be persuaded that the revolutionary movement aims to make a fundamentally different and better kind of world, and that it is dead serious about winning.

As people reach out to others with the ideas, it will be possible to call meetings of people that will be like (and later become) the local assemblies discussed above, and that will similarly use federation to create larger organizations that can mobilize larger numbers of people. This way, small groups of people who know and trust each other can join others in large numbers in an organized way, build a movement embracing a majority of the population, and gain enough support from soldiers and sailors to defeat the inevitable efforts of the ruling elite to remain in power. This is how we can make a revolution and gain the freedom to actually begin creating a new and better world.

But to successfully carry out the actions described above, people need to understand the revolutionary strategy behind them. The ruling elite today go to great lengths to ensure that we follow strategies that cannot succeed in creating a better world. It is therefore crucial that we are very clear about what a revolutionary strategy is, and what it is not.

What Strategy Makes Sense?

Before we discuss what a revolutionary strategy is, let us point out what it is not.

It is not an electoral strategy. Electoral politics trains people to rely on their representatives rather than on themselves as the people who will change society.^{§§} The electoral process is designed precisely

^{§§} For more on electoral politics, see “Fake Democracy” by Dave Stratman (<http://www.newdemocracyworld.org/old/fake.democracy.htm>) and “No, Voting Won’t Work,” by John Spritzler (<http://www.newdemocracyworld.org/old/voting.htm>).

to keep people from building mass movements and challenging the capitalist system. The Democratic and Republican parties are twin faces of capital. The role of the Republicans is to give leadership and self-confidence to pro-business forces. The role of the Democrats is to divide and undermine the self-confidence of the working class. A “third party” is no answer. Electoral campaigns, even when successful, end only in corrupting the elected representative and the movement, which scales back its goals and message to win a place in the governing apparatus.

It is not a union strategy.

The unions are part of the ruling capitalist structure. Their goal is to negotiate a contract—a truce—between capital and labor, not to win the class war. The unions accept the legitimacy of capitalism and management’s right to dominate the workplace, while they guarantee labor peace for the duration of the contract.

The unions thus function as an arm of management, undermining workers’ power, either spectacularly, as when they break strikes, or routinely and covertly, as when they organize their members into “joint” programs with management, or demobilize their members through union structures and contract obligations, or encourage their members to depend on politicians rather than on their power at the point of production. To gain real power, workers must build solidarity organizations independent of the unions. These organizations should unite employed and unemployed, American-born and immigrant workers in a movement which declares its goal of winning the class war and creating a new world. They should reach out in solidarity to workers around the world to build a global revolution.^{***}

It is not a strategy focused on winning reforms,

such as stopping a war or protecting Social Security or preventing mass layoffs, as if they were the only issue. Focusing on individual issues this way leads

^{***} For more on unions, see “How the Unions Killed the Working Class Movement” by Dave Stratman (<http://www.newdemocracyworld.org/old/How%20Unions%20Killed.htm>)

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nowhere, because each of these problems is only a symptom of the undemocratic, rapacious system in which we live. We need to get to the root of the problems, not just nibble around the edges. The only way to do that is with a revolution. We aren't dismissing people's immediate concerns. We're saying that to deal with these concerns effectively we need to tie the issues together and build a revolutionary movement. Every individual issue should be dealt with in its context in the class war. Every struggle should be conducted in such a way as to strengthen people's understanding of the root problem, spread the revolutionary movement, and build people's confidence that we can win.

It is not a strategy of

nonviolence. Aggressive violence to conquer another nation or suppress the working class is certainly immoral. But the use of force, even violent force, in self-defense is morally justified. And violence—even tactically offensive violence—to defeat oppressors who use violence or the threat of it, is self-defense. Our revolution to make a good society will be attacked by the ruling elite, who have clearly demonstrated that there is no level of violence they will not use to maintain their grip on power. It would be immoral for us not to defend ourselves from this attack.

Gandhi's philosophy of nonviolence wrongly asserts that violence in self-defense against an oppressive regime is immoral. It further asserts that if the oppressed demonstrate the sincerity of their opposition to oppression, by tactics such as going limp when attacked by police and willingly going to jail, then the ruling elite will be persuaded to stop oppressing them. History has proved this is just not true. Gandhi's nonviolent movement in India itself confirms this; it left the class system of oppression intact, merely replacing some British ruling class individuals with Indian ones.

The capitalist system will oppress people until the rulers are defeated. No revolution has succeeded without forcefully defeating the oppressor and neither will ours. People rightly applauded the violence by the French Resistance against Nazi occupation forces and by the Jews of the Warsaw Ghetto against

the Nazi military forces. But now many people are confused, partly because of being trained to believe that only the state has the right to use violence, and partly because the only use of non-state violence they perceive is media images of "anarchists" breaking windows in otherwise peaceful demonstrations or images of terrorists attacking unarmed civilians.

We oppose the use of provocateur-like incidental violence against property and persons, and we strongly condemn the use of violence against unarmed civilians, no matter what the context. At the same time, we assert the moral right of forceful resistance to ruling elites and their police, military, and other security forces. While we will attempt to win

capitalist security forces, in particular rank-and-file soldiers and sailors, to the side of the revolution through political persuasion, there will likely be times when the revolution will need to use violence in self-defense against the forces of order.

*The revolutionary strategy is to make
revolution the issue
of public and private discussion
and in every struggle.*

So What Is a Revolutionary Strategy?

The less powerful people feel, the less change they think is possible. They are thrust onto the defensive and just try to stop the next bad thing from happening. In the 1960s and '70s, teachers were trying to transform education for the better; now they are just trying to keep their jobs. Workers were striking against their union leaders for collaborating with the bosses; now they are just trying to keep their right to collective bargaining. For the past forty years, people have been on the defensive, trying to stop one more bad thing from happening. Defensive struggles are utterly demoralizing. They can never really win because they fail to challenge the structure of power in society. We need to move to the offensive.

How can we move to the offensive? By challenging capitalism's right to exist, raising the idea of revolution and showing people that there is a promising alternative to the present system.

Capitalism has tremendous tactical strength but it has seldom been as strategically weak as it is now. The system can no longer offer most people a promising future or even a convincing illusion of one. It offers only endless war, widening poverty, and debt

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peonage to the banks. Capitalism is past its sell-by date, and billions of people around the globe know it.

The revolutionary strategy is to make the need and possibility of revolution *the issue* of public and private discussion, *the issue* in every struggle, *the issue* wherever people come together to discuss their concerns. This is how we can take the offensive. This is how—by showing the roots of every issue in an undemocratic social order—we can bring together the broadest and deepest possible movement. This is how we will go on the offensive.

The strategy is twofold:

1) **Spread and deepen the idea of revolution**, by calling on people to critically examine every aspect of today's society in light of a possible democracy.

2) **Recruit people to the revolutionary movement**, to spread revolutionary literature and ideas for its realization among their friends, family, co-workers—wherever they can connect with other people.

The revolutionary movement will focus on reaching out to other working people, to show in every struggle about wages or war or Social Security that the real issue is whose values should shape society, those of ordinary people or those of the ruling elite. Today strikes and sit-ins and other traditional forms of struggle typically frame their issues narrowly. The effect is to narrow their appeal and obscure their significance. The revolutionary movement will take a far different approach, explaining specific issues in their context in the class war, appealing more effectively to the wider community.

The strength of the movement will depend on how thoroughly its recruits understand the ideas and goals of the movement, and that they themselves are the source of the movement's power. As people join the movement, they will contribute their own insights, deepen the idea of social transformation, and make it more concrete. They will get more used to seeing the connections among issues and will gain practice and confidence in their ability to talk about

The most important revolutionary activity is something that people do every day: talk with each other about the things they believe are important.

them. People will become more aware of the significance of their everyday contributions to society. They will begin to see their own struggles as part of a struggle to change the whole world. As they reach out to others, they will increasingly become part of a self-conscious revolutionary movement. This movement will begin to affect all existing and potential struggles, to move them toward explicitly revolutionary goals.

Our measure of success will not be winning this or that reform, but rather the growth of the conscious revolutionary movement.

Can the revolutionary movement succeed? We think so. There is an exciting, practical alternative to capitalism already present in the lives and aspirations of ordinary people. What we need now is a serious effort to link people here and around the world to discuss an alternative to capitalism and make it reality.

John Adams wrote in 1815 that the American Revolution was not the revolutionary war. The war was only “an effect and consequence of the Revolution in the minds of the people, from 1760-1775.” This is the Revolution that we are here attempting to achieve: a Revolution in the minds of a world of people, to transform their sense of the possibilities of human society and of their own power to fulfill them. From this Revolution in the minds of the people will come the transformation of society.

Overcoming the Obstacles

There are serious obstacles to building the revolutionary movement.

War has always been the most effective way for ruling elites to divert people from their real enemies and direct them against ordinary people in other nations. As more working people around the globe rise up against the bankers and capitalists, the ruling elites will ignite more wars, perhaps even World War III, to drown the revolutionary movement in blood. The rulers will call on our “patriotism” to “support our troops”—to murder workers of distant lands. The revolutionary movement must be

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an international movement that forges unbreakable ties with workers of other countries. Instead of yielding to the demands of our leaders to fight our class brothers and sisters, we will call on the troops to defend us from our real enemies, who are in Washington, D.C. and Wall Street, not Afghanistan or Pakistan or China.

Another way the rulers turn people against each other is by creating large numbers of immigrants. The American government forced six million Mexican peasant farmers to migrate (illegally) north to the U.S. When it created NAFTA (the North American Free Trade Agreement) with Mexico, the U.S. government required Mexico to abolish the clause in its constitution (from its revolution in 1917) that gave peasants rights to the land, and it subsidized American agri-business to flood Mexico with cheap corn. Peasant farmers in Mexico were driven out of business and could only support their families by migrating north, where they are used as cheap labor. Their illegal status and fear of deportation make it hard for them to demand decent wages and working conditions.

The rulers, while pretending to want to stop illegal immigration, encourage native workers to blame the immigrants for taking away jobs, driving down wages, and causing other hardships. They try to get native workers to ally with them against illegal immigrants, calling for tougher policing of the border and mass deportation. Clearly the revolutionary movement must ally native workers with immigrants against the rulers.

The obstacles to revolution are such that the power of the ruling class can seem overwhelming and unsailable. The perverse history of Communist revolutions has made people cynical about all revolutions. There are no significant organizations with a popular base working for democratic revolution. There is no widely-shared vision of an alternative society. Finally, there is no widely-shared understanding of ordinary people as a revolutionary force.

We believe that all these obstacles can be overcome. The starting point for breaking out of the trap of capitalist society is rejecting the capitalist view of

people. A revolutionary view of human beings is the key to removing all the other obstacles.

Understanding that ordinary people alone share values deeply opposed to the ruling capitalist elite allows us to fashion a vision of an alternative to capitalism. Spreading the revolutionary view of people enables us to reach a whole world of people who long for a better world. Understanding the revolutionary values of ordinary people allows us to see how and why Communism went wrong and to plan for a liberating and democratic revolution. Understanding that most of the world's people desire a new world helps us see that we are a powerful force.

A revolutionary view of human beings is the key to removing all the obstacles to building the revolutionary movement.

Another obstacle is the false conception of what it means to be a “revolutionary.” In the period before the movement reaches critical mass, a revolutionary is a person who spreads revolutionary ideas and helps people gain the confidence and clarity to act upon them where

they work and live, not somebody who picks up a gun. Even when the revolutionary movement reaches critical mass, spreading revolutionary ideas remains the most critical activity.

The image of a revolutionary that popular American culture offers people is one such as Che Guevara, a man who foolishly thought he could overthrow the U.S.-backed ruling elite of South America with a small band of armed men. When Che was famously captured and executed by CIA-assisted Bolivian soldiers, millions of people concluded that revolutionaries might be brave but they are also crazy and doomed to defeat—and engaged in activities that have nothing to do with the lives of ordinary people like us.

Contrary to this popular image, however, the most important revolutionary activity is something that people do every day: talk with each other about the things they believe are important.

We are proposing a revolution based on values people already share and activities we already engage in—reaching out to other people to discuss the things we care about. The starting point of democratic revolution is democratic relationships. The more we talk with each other about making a new world,

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the more we will discover that we are not alone in these hopes. The more we discover we are not alone, the more able we will feel to reach out further. The more our idea of revolution reaches into people's most deeply-held values and beliefs, the more unstoppable it will be.

How Do We Overcome Repression?

The political power of the ruling elite depends mainly on the assent of the governed. People may be deeply unhappy with the government and the direction of society, but as long as they see no alternative, they go along with things as they are. As the revolutionary movement grows, people will see an inspiring alternative and withdraw their assent to the status quo. The government will then be forced to use police and the military power to keep people in line.

But the government can use force against the people only at great political cost to itself. The more it attacks a revolutionary movement that is deeply embedded in our communities, the more it exposes itself as a tool of the rich and angers a wider circle of people.

Once revolutionary movements include the bulk of society, ruling elites become powerless to act effectively against them. French President Charles DeGaulle and his wife fled France in the dead of night in the face of the French workers' and students' movement in 1968. He was convinced that the army would not support him against the workers. It was only the treachery of the powerful Communist unions in France, which persuaded workers to abandon their strikes, that allowed the elite to stay in power. The U.S.-backed Shah of Iran used all the means at his disposal to keep his grip on society, including a huge army and SAVAK, secret police known for their brutal methods. Yet so many Iranians opposed the Shah that his regime collapsed.

The strength of the revolutionary movement lies in speaking with the voice of the people and spreading its views as widely as possible. The ultimate success of the revolution depends on the movement having a deeply democratic character, based on a democratic and positive view of human beings. We cannot prevent repression, but we can succeed despite it.

What Should You Do If You Like These Ideas?

Before you do anything else, sit back and imagine. Imagine your best friend has read this document and liked it. Imagine people you know at work and where you live have read it and liked it. Imagine that you and they are showing it to more people and they like it too. Imagine that it's not just you and your friends and neighbors, but thousands of others spreading the ideas this way. Now imagine it is millions!

When people discover they are not alone in wanting revolutionary change, then hope quickly replaces hopelessness, collective actions that formerly seemed impossible start happening, people create organizations with revolutionary goals, and a revolutionary movement emerges where earlier only apathy seemed to prevail. The most revolutionary thing we can do right now is to let people see that they are not alone in wanting a democratic revolution. Showing "Thinking" to your friends and telling them you like it is a way to make this happen.

When this happens, imagine the kinds of organizations that people will create to spread these ideas and fight for them. Imagine how worried the ruling class will be as they see soldiers and sailors influenced by these ideas because they are hearing about them from their own relatives and friends. Imagine the time when the soldiers and sailors will refuse to obey orders to attack people calling for revolution because they see that the revolutionaries are the great majority, they are "We the People" and they are fighting for a much better world. Imagine when the people's revolutionary organizations are reshaping society on the basis of mutual aid and equality and there is nothing the former ruling class can do to stop it.

All of this is possible if the very first thing you imagined is possible—that your best friend read this document and liked it. Please keep this in mind as you read on.

A revolution will only be made by millions of ordinary people contributing in ways that their time and experience allows. Here is how you can contribute to building the movement while working to make a living and caring for your family.

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Tell the person who showed you “Thinking” that you like these ideas, or at least would like to discuss them further. And share this document with somebody that you know—a family member, friend, neighbor or co-worker—and ask them if they would like to discuss it with you over a coffee or beer or whatever.

The authors of “Thinking,” John Spritzler and Dave Stratman, would also appreciate hearing your views. You may contact us at spritzler@comcast.net and newdem@aol.com, or write us at New Democracy, P.O. Box 300860, Boston, MA 02130, USA. Visit our web site at www.newdemocracyworld.org. We invite you to join our email list to exchange ideas; you can subscribe to it at <http://www.simplelists.com/subscribe/newdemocracyworld.php>.

We imagine that many little groups of friends will spring up around the country, discussing these ideas, adding their own to the mix, spreading the ideas, and recruiting new people to the group. You and your friends can do this too. This is how people will discover that they are not alone in having revolutionary aspirations—the first goal that the revolutionary movement must accomplish.

As our numbers grow we can arrange to meet, share experiences, learn from each other, and make more organized plans to reach out to yet more people and communicate our message. Our goal is to link up an increasing number of people discussing and planning how to change the world. ▲

About the Authors

John Spritzler is a Senior Research Scientist at the Harvard School of Public Health (this document has no connection, however, with that institution), the author of *The People As Enemy: The Leaders' Hidden Agenda in World War II* (Black Rose Books, 2003), and a co-editor of [newdemocracyworld.org](http://www.newdemocracyworld.org).

David Stratman is a former Washington Director of the National PTA. He directed the National Coalition for Public Education in its defeat of the Tuition Tax Credit Act in the 95th Congress. He has served as an Education Policy Fellow in the U.S. Office of Education. He earned a Ph.D. at the University of

North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where he studied as a National Defense Fellow, and has taught at New England colleges. He is the author of *We CAN Change The World: The Real Meaning of Everyday Life* (New Democracy Books, 1991) and, with John Spritzler, of *On the Public Agenda: Essays for Change* (Black Rose Books, 2006). He co-edits www.newdemocracyworld.org.

Suggested Background Reading

Murray Bookchin, *To Remember Spain: The Anarchist and Syndicalist Revolution of 1936* (You can find this online by searching for the author and title.)

Agustin Guillamon, *The Friends of Durruti Group: 1937-1939* (You can find this online by searching for the author and title.)

Peter Kropotkin, *The Conquest of Bread* (You can find this online by searching for the author and title.)

George Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia* (You can find this online by searching for the author and title.)

Sam Dolgoff, ed., *The Anarchist Collectives* (You can find this online by searching for the author and title.)

David G. Stratman, *We CAN Change the World: The Real Meaning of Everyday Life* (Online at <http://www.newdemocracyworld.org/old/Revolution/We%20Can%20Change%20the%20World%20book.pdf>). Also available from New Democracy Books, P.O. Box 300860, Boston, MA 02130. Cost: \$3.00 +\$2.00 S&H.)

John Spritzler and Dave Stratman, *On the Public Agenda: Essays for Change*, Black Rose Books, 2006 (available from New Democracy Books, P.O. Box 300860, Boston, MA 02130. Cost: \$3.00 +\$2.00 S&H.)