

## The Pluralist Commonwealth: A Community-Sustaining Next System

Gar Alperovitz and Steve Dubb

The United States is entering a period of stagnation, stalemate and decay—an historical context in which traditional options of reform and revolution both have low odds of success. At the same time, we contend that the current period opens a new strategic possibility for step-by-step, institution-building, nonviolent change that may have the potential, over time, of altering and democratizing the basic system of ownership of the economy. We term the process of systemic transformation unfolding over time “*evolutionary reconstruction*.” The path we describe draws upon literally thousands of experiments in worker ownership, neighborhood ownership, cooperatives, state banks, municipal enterprise, and many other fast developing democratic forms. The longer term vision defines a community-sustaining system that also includes sufficient national and regional planning to manage community job stability, as well as reduced growth trajectories. We term this “next system” a *pluralist commonwealth* to call attention to its diverse forms of local, state and national democratized ownership.

In a nation where one percent of the population owns nearly as much wealth as the bottom 99 percent, we believe a non-statist, community building, institution-changing strategy could open the way to a time of steadily building progressive renewal—just possibly the prehistory of the next great progressive era. The essay outlines some of the key features of a pluralist commonwealth, highlights some of the theoretical institutional design questions that must be answered, and identifies some movement building challenges that must be faced in building a more democratic American political economy.