

My Utopia or Yours?

Joshua Cohen and Joel Rogers

Like all of John Roemer's work, *A Future for Socialism*¹ casts analytical light on an intellectually deep, practically urgent problem: in this case, the problem of reconciling equality and efficiency. Roemer's proposed solution to this problem – his managerial model of market socialism – is characteristically ingenious. His argument for it is exemplary in uniting technical precision, imagination and a long view of the possibilities for social justice.

Roemer's proposal rests on three premises: (1) economic, social and political equality are fundamental values; (2) dynamic efficiency – important if equality is to mean levelling up, not down – requires markets; (3) because people are not indifferent to how they fare individually, and will not become so merely through education or a change in property rights, incentive schemes are needed to establish congruence between individual motivations and egalitarian outcomes. To promote equality in this world of markets and incentive problems, Roemer would establish a new property right, providing each citizen with claims on firm profits by endowing each with coupons that can only be used to purchase shares in firms (either directly or through mutual funds). Because the endowments are equal and the coupons cannot be cashed in, income would be more equally distributed in the coupon economy than its capitalist counterpart. To ensure dynamic efficiency, Roemer would have firms compete in markets. To solve principal-agent problems, those firms would be controlled by managers and monitored by banks.

We agree with Roemer about the importance of equality, markets and incentive problems, and share the intellectual project that follows from this agreement: to develop models of political-economic regimes, alternative to contemporary capitalism, that have sufficient *institutional* richness to show how equality might be achieved despite market and incentive constraints. Accepting a need to economize on

the scarce motives of solidarity and public-spiritedness – that shared commitments to equality will not suffice for the stability of an egalitarian social regime – means accepting the need to say something about the organizational glue that will hold the regime together.

A variety of egalitarian models or strategies might satisfy these different conditions. Roemer mentions several, including our own model/strategy of ‘associative democracy’ (pp. 51–53). What distinguishes the associative conception from Roemer’s is that it does not premise a fundamental change in property rights, though it would welcome such a change. Instead, it seeks to further egalitarian aims chiefly by improving the terms and kinds of *popular organization* on which egalitarian democratic regimes customarily rely for social and political support. Taking note of the fact that the ‘right’ (democratic, equality-enhancing) kinds of popular organization do not arise naturally under modern capitalism,² and thus that egalitarian regimes ‘naturally’ face an organizational deficit at their base, the associative view recommends curing that deficit through the deliberate use of public powers – using subsidy and other means to encourage the development of the missing organizational bases of support.³

The concerns that have led us to this recommendation also summarize our differences with Roemer’s managerial model. These stem in part from differences in normative emphasis, in part from skepticism about the political feasibility of the managerial model. In what follows, we explore these differences and then speculate briefly on what taking our side in them might presently imply for socialist practice.

Differences with Roemer

Norms and politics

When Roemer surveys the demise of state socialism and asks what is left of the socialist project, his answer is ‘equality’. Our answer is ‘democracy’. Certain differences in institutional recommendation follow from this difference in normative emphasis.

With respect in particular to the organization of the economy, we are as concerned with democratic *control* of the economy as with the likely consequence of that control – the material equality that has long provided Roemer’s principal focus. Property has two aspects – control and benefit – and the socialist critique of private property embraces both. The best in the socialist tradition was always about, and in our view the best continuation should centrally be about, collective

control of economic resources – about ‘economic democracy’ broadly understood as popular control of the kind and conditions of economic activity – as well as equal sharing in the material benefits of that activity. Indeed, far from recommending a retreat from this democratic aspect of the traditional socialist project, present circumstances recommend special insistence on it, with ‘democratic control of the economy’ understood as one instance of the radical democracy we take to lie at the core of socialist ideals.⁴

Having drawn attention to this normative difference with Roemer, we do not wish to exaggerate it. Roemer mentions the importance of political equality – ‘equal opportunity for political influence’ (p. 11) – as one dimension of socialist concern, and his model of market socialism has parties competing for office in part on the basis of different proposals about investment. Reciprocally, we are attracted to the associative view in part because we think that the changes in organization will produce changes in bargaining power, and that those changes are needed to bring greater equality in the distribution of resources.⁵ Still, a difference of emphasis remains. Our associative conception is focused as much on the organization of power as on the distribution of resources. Managerial market socialism is democratic, but it does not take the democratization of economic power as a principal concern.

Our second area of disagreement with Roemer concerns the feasibility of managerial socialism as a *political* project. Roemer would grant that what we are discussing here – and whether it is called ‘socialism’ or ‘egalitarianism’ hardly matters for this point – must be thought of as a political project, not just an intellectual one.⁶ Taking that seriously, however, requires more than describing institutional models that achieve equality consistent with protecting markets and addressing incentive problems. It means also saying something about the likely *agents* of institutional reform (who would carry it out) and the continuing social bases of *stability* in reform arrangements (how they would be supported once in place). In addressing these concerns, moreover, political projects assume the burden of starting from somewhere – some determinate place in the social world. However remote their goal, they need to offer a strategy for advancing toward that goal from that place, taking measure of the barriers as well as opportunities it poses for reform. As the world changes, they correlatively need to assume the burden of rethinking their strategy in light of those changes.

Roemer ignores most of these problems and concerns. Most strikingly, perhaps, he ignores this last requirement to take notice of

changes in that place from which his political project must start. Roemer's managerial model could perfectly well have been offered at the beginning of the century and defended in much the same terms (equality, dynamic efficiency, incentives, etc.) that Roemer now defends it. To be sure, *A Future for Socialism* is informed by one major change, the collapse of the Soviet 'experiment'.⁷ But it is much less concerned with changes in contemporary capitalism – in the structure of labor markets, working class composition, firm operation, relations among firms and between them and the state, relations among national economies to one another and between them and the international economy – that provide the more relevant context for projects of egalitarian reform. Roemer observes that 'modern capitalism provides us with many fertile possibilities for designing the next wave of socialist experiments' (p. 125). It is all the more surprising then that he offers no account of how social and organizational developments within capitalism bear on the appropriate institutional expression of the egalitarian project; in particular on the issues of agency and stability that mark political projects off from their intellectual analogues.

Roemer's silence on these matters amounts to admission that the managerial model is not a *political* project at all, since without attention to this world he cannot offer an account of how to get from it to his goal. And that is a serious problem, if it aims to be more than an intellectual exercise.

Lost in the real world

To sharpen this criticism, consider a few features of the contemporary world. Familiar enough, we think they bear decisively on just which sorts of strategies – within the range of alternatives concerned with equality, dynamic efficiency, and incentives – are most promising as political projects.

1. *Social heterogeneity*. Social democracy is the only egalitarian politics successfully practiced under democratic conditions in a modern economy. But the 'natural' or 'organic' social base of social democracy – an organized working class – has largely disappeared. Made under conditions of mass production, that class is now highly fragmented under the decline of those conditions and the world of the family wage that accompanied them. Several factors have served to disrupt existing working-class organizations and deepen the heterogeneity of interests within the working class itself: transformations in

the organization of production (decentralization within firms and more joint production across them, along with new technology and greater returns to differentially supplied human capital in its use); changes in the composition of the work force (in particular, increased female labor force participation); and shifts in the terms of competition (more exacting, owing to new entrants, more rapid technology diffusion, internationalization). Even construed as limited to class concerns, then, mass egalitarian politics finds itself without a unified agent.

2. *Diversity of interests*. At the same time, a variety of interests not best organized from the standpoint of formal class positions – interests in gender or racial justice, the environment, or other 'non-class' concerns – are expressed today with a robustness and intensity exceeding those of class. Moreover, these interests are seen as irreducible to class, and are jointly pursued at least in part by those with antagonistic class positions. So any mass egalitarian politics limited to class concerns would likely be doomed. At the same time, no new and politically efficacious solidarity has emerged out of this heterogeneity of interests.

3. *Limits of the state*. If working-class organizations provided the social foundation for democratic egalitarianism, the state was its immediate agent. But the state is a less resourceful ally than it once was. Increased internationalization of product and capital markets has qualified a centerpiece of traditional egalitarian economic policy – Keynesian demand management – by qualifying the degree to which demand will be met by domestic firms. The same factors have enlarged domestic capital's possibilities of exit from progressive national tax regimes. Changes in the sorts of problems the state is asked to address have also highlighted longstanding incapacities of state institutions.⁸ With a greater recognized range of social interests and less self-regulation by disintegrating communities, the state is asked to regulate more broadly and extensively than in the past. But government often lacks the local knowledge needed to determine appropriate standards or the most appropriate means for satisfying those standards in diverse circumstances; its monitoring and enforcement capacity, especially in areas requiring compliance across numerous and dispersed sites, is inadequate. So too is its ability to administer solutions, ever more in demand, that require coordination across multiple policy domains and communities of interest.

Why this is a problem for Roemer

Roemer needs to worry about these familiar facts of the present world for the same reason any egalitarian reformer with a political project needs to worry about them: because they obscure the agents of reform, and the stability of reform arrangements.

Consider stability. Any political alternative needs a social base to support it, against opposition, in the everyday politics and practical administration of a social order. Given general possibilities of defection from general social norms and the enlargement of those possibilities by the existence of markets, egalitarian democratic alternatives are particularly in need of some significant measure of social integration and solidarity. The basic reason why is that no social design is 'strategy proof'. No matter how carefully designed the scheme of social cooperation, no matter how ingenious its incentives to behavior that produces egalitarian outcomes, individuals motivated only by self-interest will find a way to muck it up. And once they do, even those earlier prepared to be bound by solidaristic norms will depart from them; to be solidaristic is, after all, not to be a sucker.

Roemer thus needs an account of stability more robust than that provided by calculations of individual material advantage within his property rights regime. 'Those who benefit will provide the base' is not an answer to the question of social support. Even if all those with convergent interests improbably agreed to initial cooperation,⁹ subsequent defections might be rewarded and begin to spiral. A social base is not simply a collection of beneficiaries. Something needs to be said about their motivations. To *maintain* equality, Roemer needs something like an egalitarian political culture, nurturing a 'civic consciousness' in its participants congruent with egalitarian ends.¹⁰

Such consciousness depends in turn on social organization; it cannot live exclusively off the fact that individuals enjoy the status of equal citizenship. Assuming democratic conditions and rights of association, *organized groups* will emerge that provide potentially competing bases of political identity, with dispersed 'veto powers' to block alternatives that do not conform to their particular ends. So, a political culture friendly to equality requires support in those groups themselves. Such organizations must be sufficiently rooted in the particularity of individual experience to be regarded by members as compelling expressions of their identity and instruments of their interests. At the same time, their behavior needs to be congruent with a general interest in equality, else the constitutionally equalizing

property regime fall prey to the same group rent-seeking and particularism that now plague all pluralist democracies.¹¹ Minimally, the stability of managerial socialism requires the cooperation of such organizations in its mass politics and daily administration: in the debates within formal political arenas about alternatives investment strategies and in the public monitoring of the banks in turn entrusted with the monitoring of firms.

One way or another, working along this chain of stability requirements, Roemer will thus come face to face with the present disarray of solidaristic institutions and the ways that present economic organization advances that disarray. He will need, in short, to confront the facts about heterogeneity, diversity and the limited capacity of present governing institutions. The fact that, in the present proposal, he has nothing to say about these matters is fair grounds for worry about its feasibility as a stable model.¹²

Even before indulging worries about managerial socialism's stability, however, Roemer needs to say something about the *agents* who might put that model in place. Again, the reasons are straightforward enough. Any reform as radical as his coupon scheme will be fiercely resisted by the holders of wealth. Its beneficiaries will need to struggle for it, and the result of that struggle will depend importantly on how well they are organized. Such organization is almost entirely lacking at present, remote, given the present state of division, and unlikely to get closer by building a political movement around coupon socialism. It is almost inconceivably absent from some project for coordination more immediate and concrete than his distant 'future'. Whatever the content of that more immediate project, however, advance on it will not only risk a redefinition of goals away from his model – perhaps toward once familiar proposals to 'attenuate class struggle through social-democratic concessions' (p. 129) – but also again raises the problems of group faction and coordination that he now mistakenly feels safe to ignore. Once again, he will be forced to address the demands of a political project and the special problems of actually organizing egalitarian politics under present circumstances, which show a decomposition of solidarity proceeding not only within existing groups but between them.

In making these points, we do not mean simply to be restating the obvious – that politics is hard, egalitarian politics harder still, and that someone's moving from here to there requires a sense of *who* and *here* as well as *there*. We also think that acceptance of what we have said provides a basis for real doubt about the desirability of Roemer's project *as against alternatives*.

Take, for example, our own proposal of an associative egalitarian strategy.¹³ Roemer concedes that its endpoint – again limiting ourselves to the material equality dimension that principally concerns him – may be indistinguishable from his own. But notice of the organizational politics he will need raises two questions. First, in facing those politics is he better off with or without a deliberate politics of association of the kind we recommend, with regularized possibilities for the support of the social base he needs? Leaving prudent doubts about the possibility of our own proposal aside, to ask that question is to answer it. He is better with an associative strategy available to help him – a strategy for rebuilding now-decaying solidarities.

Secondly, if implementing his proposal requires the same sort of social base we aim to construct, and if the result of its construction is to achieve a reasonably egalitarian result, why bother implementing his proposal at all? Institution building has costs. If a successful effort to build the institutions Roemer recommends (new property rights, monitoring banks, all the rest) requires the organizational base we recommend, and if that organizational base is sufficient for the common aim of equality, the cost of building those new institutions is sheer waste for the egalitarian project. Instead of reconciling equality and efficiency, Roemer's model would provide another case study in their divergence.

Roemer's partial answer to this question is that his strategy is preferred in those circumstances where the associative strategy has least initial base. This turns out to be countries lacking a recent history of liberal association, viz. developing capitalist countries of both the 'authoritarian' and 'democratic' variety, and especially the nations of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. In such settings, where the underdevelopment of capitalist democracy minimizes the 'opportunity costs of adopting market socialism' (p. 126), Roemer speculates that his scheme might be mandated, electorally or not, by what would effectively amount to a coup. Elsewhere, the temptations of 'social-democratic concessions' stopping short of the real reform he has in mind will likely still the model's advance.¹⁴

But even if we agreed with Roemer's handicapping of the managerial model's prospects in different systems,¹⁵ this is not much of an answer, given the difficulties associated with *maintaining* any egalitarian project without widespread and democratically organized popular support. Among the lessons of the Soviet 'experiment', surely this is every bit as prominent as the vagaries of centralized planning. And once the need for democratic organization is recognized – whatever the

historical setting and traditions of association – Roemer is back in the difficult territory marked above in our discussion of regime stability.

What Do We Have in Mind?

Thus far, we have only criticized Roemer. Have we got something better? To get to an answer, let's first see what 'better' entails. A political project worthy of support must be organized around a set of political commitments attractive enough to encourage its adherents to stick with it, especially during the reversals of fortune that inevitably befall any project of radical reform. It must accompany those commitments with a vision of a stable institutional order that would realize them more fully than they now are. It must address the issue of agency – who might plausibly be moved to carry the project from here to there. And its account of stability and agency must of course be guided by an understanding of the circumstances to which it is addressed.

Suppose we take these points about political projects seriously, and that we accept the stylized facts, about heterogeneity, diversity, and the limits of the state, as important elements of the circumstances that political projects need to consider. Suppose, too, that we add in a commitment to the idea of democratic control, as an additional element of an egalitarian project. What, then, might an attractive political project look like?

Economic democracy?

One possible answer is 'economic democracy', a suggestion that seems to follow naturally from taking the *control* aspect of socialism more seriously than Roemer does. As commonly interpreted, however, economic democracy runs into problems as an answer, for it shares many of the difficulties Roemer encounters from not looking hard enough at present capitalism.

Of course, the content of the idea of economic democracy is a matter of longstanding dispute in the socialist tradition. By turns it has been interpreted to require: national planning as an alternative to market coordination; parliaments of industry to supplement territorial with functional representation and coordinate particular sectors; or worker cooperatives or self-management at the level of individual firms. Today, national planning and parliaments of industry are objects of

limited enthusiasm; the idea of firm-based worker cooperatives and self-management, however, continues to enjoy support.

Even that support, we believe, needs now to be qualified. We are all for democracy at the workplace, and certainly believe that associational rights within the workplace should be strengthened to that end. But we are much less confident than traditional workplace democracy advocates that the firm provides an appropriate unit of organizational analysis in the construction of a democratic society.

Our reasons go back to the stylized facts offered above. The collapse of the old mass production system has been associated with a rise in decentralized firms with more permeable boundaries and less stable internal labor markets, growing workforce heterogeneity and work 'casualization', greater dependence of individual welfare on the ability to move successfully across several firms in a working lifetime, and, at least in many areas of manufacturing – and perhaps more generally in an increasingly service-driven economy – a dominance of regional labor market effects over particular industry effects in wages, working conditions, benefits, and lifetime earnings. All this makes the individual firm less compelling as locus for the aggregation of interests and for the formation of solidarities that contribute to democracy. Interest heterogeneity also suggests a need for varied mechanisms to address different dimensions of concern (for example, wages, environment, health and safety). While the degree to which the real economy approximates a 'virtual' one, with Moebius-like boundaries between carnivalesque firms and plastic identities of workers within them, is commonly exaggerated, we take it now to be beyond question that an exclusively firm-based system of economic democracy no longer fits the actual economy. In addition to institutions within firms, we need institutions of popular economic control articulated on a supra-firm basis.

What then?

But if a simple revival of traditional understandings of economic democracy does not define a plausible political project, a modern effort to assert democratic control over the economy, and to unleash the productivity gains potentially associated with such control, may well be.

The need for control is evident from the record of present failure: inequality, unemployment, environmental degradation, relentless stress on working families. And if it could succeed, certainly, a project of democratic control would enjoy very broad support. But precisely

what is popularly in doubt is whether such control is *practical*; whether it can be administered in ways that are efficient, and not fatal to the engine of economic welfare.

Egalitarian concerns benefited during the Keynesian age from rough congruence between politically organized demands (in trade unions, for example, a promise of stable employment, job ladders, and higher wages) and the requirements for advancing broader social welfare. High and rising wage floors helped to assure effective demand for goods produced within national economies. Capitalists within those economies thus had reasons to invest. Their investment increased productivity. Steady productivity growth lowered the real costs of consumption and other goods. And for those needs not satisfied by the organized market economy, or those individuals not succeeding in the labor market, high-employment capitalism provided the tax base for a decent welfare state.

Today, however, Keynesianism is again compromised by international product and capital flows, high-wage/high-employment capitalism is receding, and the welfare state is fiscally compromised both by increased need and the decreased willingness of remaining 'winners' to subsidize their brethren. Most immediately, increased competition and firm variety have reduced the ability of trade unions to mandate wage norms. In this world, popular organizations appear not as guarantors of social welfare, but as obstacles to the efficient, flexible, rapid, productive redeployment of social resources.

At least, they do to the extent that such organizations focus only on distributional concerns and not on improving, within an egalitarian frame, the productivity of the economy itself. Again, in the recent past the productivity benefits of redistribution, via the higher wages, greater investment, higher productivity cycle just described, were key to establishing popular confidence in and support for egalitarian institutions. And the requirement that such institutions be useful in this most profane of senses remains operative today, a *de facto* precondition of a truly mass egalitarian politics.

How to further that profane project? Perhaps, building off the attractions of greater democratic control over the terms and conditions of economic activity, by organizing that control as a source of productivity advance. Certainly evident within advanced capitalisms, and increasingly apparent in developing ones, is the need for a variety of collective goods that are important for economic performance, that firms will not provide on their own, and that the state cannot be relied on to provide. These include such goods as effective systems of training, technology diffusion, regional labor market administration,

and the consolidated delivery of now discrete welfare services. They include as well the more fugitive goods of 'trust' and 'civic consciousness' that themselves rely for their provision on some degree of equality of opportunity and welfare, democratic rights and clarity on the mutuality of obligations in a new social contract.

The only organizations capable of assuring the provision of such goods, albeit always working with firms and the state, are popular organizations rooted in the economy and society itself. They alone have both the political clout to declare and enforce the terms of the new social contract and the local knowledge and capacity to assist firms in meeting its terms.

Consider, then, a rejuvenated egalitarian-democratic program, focussed on the democratic control of the economy that is one aspect of the democratic ideal, and focussed within that both on controlling the terms of economic association and on increasing social productivity with support from – and in response to demands by – democratic institutions. The supports we have already glossed; they consist in the collective goods that a disorganized capitalism is unable as well as unwilling to provide but upon which the most productive capitalisms depend. What of the demands? Assistance to firms might naturally be coupled with insistence that wage, employment, and other welfare norms be accordingly raised and more generally enforced. In an age of unstable product markets and insecure jobs, those norms might include full employment (in part as a productivity whip), and a direction of labor market and welfare services toward providing career (vs job) security and lifetime (vs cross-sectional) equalities in reward. To reduce market dependence without bankrupting the state, they would likely include steeply progressive taxation of social benefits, which should come to be regarded (very much in a Roemerian spirit, we might add) as simply another source of income.

'Nice work if you can get it', it might be observed; and fairly enough. Our point is that getting this nice work requires some deliberate attention to building the organizations responsible for carrying it forward; it requires an associative strategy.

To take one step backward, that associations are needed to play this role is almost self-evident. They are needed to serve as instruments of democratic control and because they have competencies that naturally complement the limited capacities of the state noted earlier. In a world of heterogeneity and diversity, of course, just the right kind of organizations commonly do not exist. But their predecessors, as evident in trade union efforts to assert control over training programs, or community organizations to monitor compliance with

environmental regulation, are struggling to be born into maturity. With some deliberate encouragement, that maturity might be achieved.

To take one step forward, such encouragement is what associative democracy is about. The associative strategy recommends using public powers to encourage the development of secondary associations congruent with egalitarian-democratic ends. Thus, where manifest inequalities in political representation now exist, we recommend promoting the organized representation of presently excluded interests. Where associations have greater competence than public authorities for achieving democratic ends, or where their participation could improve the effectiveness of government programs, we recommend encouraging a more direct and formal governance role for groups. And where group particularism undermines democratic deliberation or popular sovereignty, we recommend organizational changes that encourage the organized to be more other-regarding in their actions.

Suppose, then, that such acts of creation, encouragement and subsidy were directed first to those organizations directly assisting in the democratic reconstruction of the economy. This would help to provide some rationale, structure and immediate attraction to a concerted program of public supports of secondary association. For example, trade unions and employer associations that took on responsibility for the joint development of training curricula, might be encouraged by public grants contingent on their assumption of such responsibilities. For the associations, this would mean a gain in resources for doing what their members wanted them to do anyway: in the case of workers, to assure transportability of credentials across unstable employment contracts; in the case of firms, to assure a more qualified labor market pool and lower search costs in finding skilled labor. A second example would be support for regional labor market institutions that underwrote wage norms across metropolitan economies. This might be done through 'sectoral' bargaining, in which newly organized workers were automatically accreted to labor pools with defined wage and benefit standards, or it might be done, more simply, by applying construction union 'pre-hire' norms throughout the labor market. By either route, the result would appeal to workers in its assurance of some generality in wage conditions; it would also appeal to reasonable-wage firms because it would remove ruinous competition from fly-by-night 'sweating' firms. A final example would be the empowerment of community organizations to serve as 'early warning' sentinels for industrial dislocation or monitors for enforcement of public norms on toxic emissions, non-discriminatory hiring,

or other matters of use to all because their contact with local contexts gives them monitoring capacities superior to state inspectorates.

In such a world, popular capacities for economic administration, achieved through organizations extending beyond individual firms, would grow in tandem with the elaboration of social norms on economic activity. The state, and politics generally, would devote itself to securing the social-institutional bases of democratic administration.

Full employment, a high social wage, and appropriate popular organizations – interacting as mutually enforcing points on a triangle of supports for a highly productive and highly egalitarian capitalism – would be an appealing package indeed. But now imagine what would be obvious to all in this world: that the coordination of those organizations was key to social welfare. As the economy came gradually under increased popular control, the material bases of democratic solidarity – commitment to the democracy that was the gist of such control – would become more visible. A strengthening of democratic solidarity out of the present heterogeneity of interests would then be thinkable. The mutual respect of equals that lies at the heart of the democratic ideal would be recognized as a functional contributor to well-being, not just an attractive norm.

In this economy, democratic organization would really determine, in part by taking responsibility for it, the organization of the production system; the content of a growing share of employment would be determined by social deliberations about the values the society wishes reflected in the organization of production; democratic control over the economy and with it the rest of social life (not just the equality in distribution that such control would premise as one ingredient) would again be the self-conscious aim of radical democracy.

How does such a project fare by the criteria of successful political projects sketched above? The focus on democratic control should strengthen the moral attractions of the project beyond those that attach to a project focussed principally on distribution. The immediate attention to issues of broad concern – reconstructing the economy – should help to address the agency question. The constructive artifice of associations will help to ensure stability by building the social foundations for a more egalitarian form of democracy. Finally, the fact that just such a project is already suggested in all manner of popular struggles, large and small, suggests that it is more immediately organizable than Roemer's, even as it is almost equally remote in its mature realization.

But if Roemer needs to take politics more seriously, do we need to

get more serious about property rights? Won't the associative strategy face debilitating opposition if it does not transform property rights? Perhaps the success of associative democracy (its stability as an egalitarian scheme) will depend finally on market socialism. Perhaps we ought to think of these schemes as mutually supportive rather than as competitors.

One thing seems clear: radical democratic reconstruction would be immensely aided by a fairer distribution of property rights of the kind that Roemer describes. Might such a distribution be *necessary* to the stability of our egalitarian future? Nobody knows the answer to this question, but these appear to be the relevant considerations. We know that: (1) enormous gains can be made in equality without fundamental disturbance of capitalist property rights; this, among others, is the lesson of social democracy; (2) no massive reorganization of property rights, under democratic conditions, is possible without the social supports we have emphasized here; supports that are presently lacking and cannot reasonably be expected to arise without deliberate encouragement. Putting (1) and (2) together, it appears that the associative strategy is necessary background to property rights reform, and, if pursued more adventurously than social democracy, may be a sufficient condition for equality. Assuming it is sufficient, that is the end of the argument. Assuming it is not, then our discussion of stability suggests that: (3) any regime based on reorganized property rights would *require* continuing support from group organizations, again not arising naturally; moreover, (4) the precise content and character of market socialist arrangements (for example, how managerial they ought to be) is best discussed in light of explicit assumptions about the associative environment from which they emerge. Thus, we agree that associative democracy may require market socialism, but we are confident that market socialism needs something like associative democracy and that assessments of alternative versions of market socialism must take this social background into account.

We understand and expect that this telegraphic exposition convinces no one that the associative project is any more feasible than Roemer's. Our burden here, however, is not to make a compelling case about feasibility, but to indicate how the *kinds* of considerations we have entered as grounds for skepticism about Roemer's project might be incorporated in an alternative strategy. Our point is not that the managerial model is a bad one – it certainly is not – but that it is unnecessarily inattentive to the requirements of politics. However unformed our own speculations, they should at least persuade that it is possible to seek to meet such requirements; to discipline institutional

speculation by reference to the demands of political projects. This is the discipline we miss in Roemer's speculations.

Notes

1. John E. Roemer, *A Future for Socialism*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1994. References to Roemer's book will be included parenthetically within the text.

2. Not that they arise naturally under an alternative to capitalism. Instead we mention capitalism to indicate the context for our discussion.

3. For details, see our 'Secondary Associations and Democratic Governance', *Politics and Society* 20 (December 1992): pp. 393-472; 'Associations and Democracy', *Social Philosophy and Policy* 10 (Summer 1993), pp. 282-312; 'Associative Democracy', in K. Pranab, J. Bardhan and John E. Roemer, eds, *Market Socialism*, New York: Oxford University Press 1993 pp. 236-52; 'Solidarity, Democracy, Association', in Wolfgang Streeck, ed., *Staat und Verbände*, Sonderheft der *Politischen Vierteljahresschrift*, Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag 1994.

4. In thinking this, of course, we are not alone. Compare what Jürgen Habermas and Adam Michnik recently had to say in response to the question 'what is left of socialism?':

Habermas: Radical democracy.

Michnik: I quite agree with that.

Jürgen Habermas and Adam Michnik, 'Overcoming the Past', *New Left Review* 203 (January-February 1994), pp. 3-16, at 11.

5. Of course, changes in bargaining power can rise to the level of the liquidation of competitive markets and the innovation they encourage - the familiar nightmare of rent-seeking, soft budget constraints and the rest. But as we indicate in the sources cited in note 3, increased popular organization can also enhance economic efficiency. The problem (discussion of which lies beyond the scope of this article) is to show how to capture the gains and avoid the nightmares. Suffice it to say here that associations with the power to cause troubles for dynamic efficiency do not originate with associative democracy. Instead the associative view departs from the premise that such associations are part of the terrain in a modern democracy, and seeks to address the troubles that they can cause.

6. Roemer offers only the barest of suggestions on how his managerial model might be taken up as a political project, but clearly recognizes the need to think of it as such. '[F]or any end state of a social process to be feasible, a path must exist from here to there, and so at least a rough sketch of possible routes, if not a precise map, may reasonably be asked of someone attempting to describe the final destination' (p. 126).

7. While the point may not bear emphasis, in general and throughout we are less preoccupied with the collapse of the Soviet Union, and less regretful of it, than Roemer appears to be. Specifically, we are less inclined to look to the Soviet 'experiment' for instruction on the importance of markets or the recalcitrance of human motivations to sweeping revision; and (with our own long view of the possibilities for human justice) we unambivalently welcome the collapse of that dungeon.

8. To be more precise, these incapacities are not just 'longstanding', but more or less definitive of modern state governance.

9. For a classic argument why such initial cooperation should be thought an improbable outcome of shared individual interests, see Mancur Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1965; for a recent extension and qualification of it, see Gerald Marwell and Pamela Oliver, *The Critical*

Mass in Collective Action: A Micro-Social Theory Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1993.

10. If this seems inconsistent with our earlier agreement on the need to economize on scarce motives, we note that economizing is not the same as abstaining.

11. Roemer observes that we 'view "factionalism" as a possible problem in [our associative democracy] proposal, that society would become partitioned into groups each concerned only with its own parochial interest' (pp. 52). While he goes on to say that faction 'may be a generic problem of all democracies', he apparently takes our attention to the problem to amount to an 'admission against interest' - good evidence of the weakness of our proposal. If we have Roemer right in this, he is mistaken. We take the problem of 'faction', broadly understood to denote pathologies of both inequality and particularism in secondary organization, *now* to be pervasive in existing liberal democracies. Our proposal is offered to relieve it.

12. Our concern about Roemer's inattention to the critical role that supportive group politics play in the stability of his model may suggest an equally powerful concern about our own proposal for associative democracy, viz. that its stability will turn on changed property rights assignments to which we are inattentive. We respond to this objection at pp. 118-20.

13. We believe the same points could be made for other proposals, but feel no burden to carry them here.

14. Once he makes this distinction, however, Roemer immediately fudges it with the suggestion that partial programs of egalitarian denationalization might provide a natural cross-walk between the demands of his model and the politics of emerging mass democracies. We agree, but then resist too sharp a distinction between the 'social wage' now provided by social democratic welfare states and the reform he has in mind.

15. Recent experience in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union is not promising on this score.