

Subsistence as a Social Right: A Political Ideal for Socialism?

Ian Angus
Department of Humanities
Simon Fraser University

Published originally as “Equality, Community and Sustainability” in Ed Broadbent (ed), *Democratic Equality: What Went Wrong?* Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2001. This revised version appeared as “Subsistence as a Social Right: A New Political Ideal for Socialism?” in *Studies in Political Economy*, No. 65, Summer 2001.

It’s no secret that the socialist project has been rather beleaguered recently. Of the many relevant aspects of this contemporary context, I want to mention only three: The internal collapse of most Communist regimes in 1989 has hastened the urgency for democratic socialists to not just state, or assume, their difference from state socialism, but to re-form their critique of capitalism so that it does not, even implicitly, suggest that state centralism might be a viable alternative to the ‘anarchy’ of the capitalist market. Also, with the rise of neo-liberal critiques of social welfare in capitalist states, social democratic parties been subject to a constant pressure toward the centre of the political spectrum. Their contributions seem limited to arguing that globalization need not necessarily mean a race toward the lowest common denominator and that social welfare policies are ‘good for business.’ Rare indeed are the instances in which social democratic parties have put proposals for deep-seated economic and social reform before the population. Finally, while political parties and institutions, including those of the Left, have suffered from delegitimation and charges of irrelevance, social movements have

managed to put new issues in front of the public and to keep alive the spirit of social criticism.

Now, these are generalizations, of course, and I hasten to add that I mean no criticism of those socialists who have resisted these trends or pushed social movements toward a more comprehensive analysis. Just the opposite. Rather, I want to sketch a perspective that, I hope, could contribute to revitalizing socialist thought in this beleaguered situation. This essay is thus an exercise in ‘political thought.’ It is not about philosophical fundamentals—such as ‘what is the good society?’—nor about specific struggles or critiques. It is an attempt to articulate some mid-level thoughts about the ethical, economic and political claims of socialism that might contribute to future debates. Also, it aims at coherence—that is to say, I don’t attempt to mention everything that is important, but rather to follow out the implications of a couple of basic issues and to articulate their inter-relation. In that sense, it is admittedly partial. Despite these limitations, it does seem to me that contemporary attempts at coherent, if not comprehensive, socialist political thought are necessary for both a future theoretical synthesis and the sort of collations and compromises involved in a political platform.¹ The presupposition of this attempt is thus that such theory or platform does not now exist in ready-made form. In that sense, it is both a post-Marxist and post-social-democratic essay that attempts to bring the whole of the socialist experience into contemporary focus. This focus is limited, though, to the situation of North-Atlantic-type capitalist societies, with Canada especially in mind. Here, our most immediate historical experience is the building, and then attack upon, the welfare state.

In the period from the end of World War Two until its decline and, perhaps, dismantling in recent years, the welfare state achieved a degree of equality and social justice that was unprecedented in North Atlantic capitalist societies. By balancing the endemic inequalities caused by a capitalist economy with redistributive and social security programs enacted through the nation-state, the welfare state managed to bring

the working class into the mainstream of capitalist society. The idea of social rights—rights to employment, good working conditions, unemployment insurance, education, health care, pensions, etc.—that underlay the practice of the welfare state gained the acceptance of a majority of the working class, such that they could see themselves as full, if comparatively powerless, citizens of capitalist society. In return for this inclusion, they accepted the necessity to work and to contribute socially, through taxes, to the maintenance of the society that guaranteed those social rights. T. H. Marshall, the major theorist of the welfare state, explained social rights as "the whole range from the right to a modicum of economic welfare and security to the right to share to the full in the social heritage and to live the life of a civilized being according to the standards prevailing in the society."² It is important to emphasize in the contemporary context that social rights were *universal rights*—they applied to everyone equally—and were not simply a "social safety net" for the poor, unfortunate or unworthy.

Social rights reformed the capitalist conception of property. The capitalist conception of property is based upon the unrestricted right to exclude all others from the use of a good. Such an exclusive property right had become dominant by displacing an earlier, pre-capitalist conception of property in which various persons and groups could have different property rights in the same thing. Each thing used to be criss-crossed, as it were, by a net of overlapping uses that were recognized in the notion of common property. Common property is the right not to be excluded from the use of a thing, whereas the capitalist conception of property is the right to exclude all others. C. B. Macpherson was referring to this history when he argued that "the rise of the welfare state has created new forms of property and distributed them widely—all of them being rights to a revenue."³ If one has the right not be excluded from a revenue, then one gains the right to exercise one's abilities in the production of that revenue. This right may then be called one's right in a common property. The welfare state made an important incursion into capitalist property by asserting that everyone has a right to make a living

and thus that the necessary means for work are common property. This did not mean, of course, that capitalist private property was abolished as such, but rather that the nation-state asserted the right of workers not to be excluded from the provision of jobs by private industry. In short, the state was committed to policies aimed at securing full employment. In Macpherson's words, "that right amounts to a right of access to the means of labour which they do not own."⁴ A common property in the means to work as enforced by the nation-state was a key component in ending the social marginalization of the working class.

The recognition of social rights and common property in the welfare state forged a new and compelling identity for most members of the working class. These new rights were not simply new elements of their situation but, in identifying strongly with them, the identity of the working class was transformed. They became citizens with rights that extended into the workplace and family. This new identity displaced the us-versus-them mentality that had prevailed previously and brought the majority of citizens to identify with the goals of society as a whole, to create a national moral community that mitigated the competitive individualism and class antagonism of market society.

The resurrection of thinking about the welfare state is thus an important task in the contemporary context—where social programs are castigated as simply "free lunches" for the poor; where national politics has been reduced to a battle of interest groups without ethical content; where individualism runs rampant and moral feelings are derided as sentimental and unrealistic; where multinational capitalist firms put pressure on governments to reduce taxes; where the fabric of everyday life is increasingly degraded by the stress of intensifying work, unemployment and homelessness; where marginalization of individuals, groups and regions threatens to become permanent; and where many citizens retreat into cynicism or private life. Many concerned citizens today fear that the capitalism of the future will look more like the capitalism of a hundred years ago than the apparently anomalous episode of the welfare state. It is no wonder that we

live in a time in which us-versus-them thinking is on the rise throughout all arenas of social life.

The welfare state, as a key moment in the history of socialism in which workers became citizens, was characterized by an expanding post-War industrial economy with its emphasis on Fordist production and mass consumption. Expenditures on social rights could thus be combined with an expectation of general employment and a rising standard of living. The basic social unit that was assumed to be the beneficiary of social welfare was the nuclear family. The husband's 'family wage' was complemented by the assumption that the wife would be a full-time mother and housewife.⁵ In this sense, the income policies of the welfare state incorporated an institutional separation between social reproduction in industry and in the family that determined the different and complementary relations of men and women. The root of this separation was in the association between women, reproduction, the family, and nature.⁶ For these reasons, the ideas and practice of the welfare state should be considered a continuation of the dominant emphasis in the socialist tradition on the idea of progress. Since the 18th century Enlightenment, the idea of progress has been associated with the domination of nature by science and technology such that material wealth for greater general abundance could be created. Such general abundance was believed to provide the essential conditions for a society of greater equality, political participation and both individual and social development. The socialist tradition differed from the liberal one in arguing that this ideal could only be realized if class inequality was eliminated or, at least, decreased, but the attachment to the idea of moral-political progress through the domination of nature was a common heritage from the Enlightenment.

It is important to note, however, that there was always an important minority tradition that advocated the reconciliation, or harmony, of humanity with nature. The utopian socialists, the early Marx, and the anarchist tradition are the main examples of this. Kropotkin perhaps put this ideal of local self-reliance most clearly when he argued

for "a society where each individual is a producer of both manual and intellectual work; where each able-bodied human being is a worker, and where each worker works in both the field and the industrial workshop; where every aggregation of individuals, large enough to dispose of a certain variety of natural resources—it may be a nation, or rather a region—produces and itself consumes most of its own agricultural and manufactured produce."⁷

In our time the idea of continuous progress has come under serious criticism, largely due to the nightmarish experiences of the twentieth century in the use of science and technology to intensify the destructiveness of war, repression and genocide. But it is also apparent that the huge increases in material production during this century have failed to translate into general equality and social participation. The welfare state, being based on the assumption of the idea of progress through industrial growth, has thus been out of step with the major criticism of the idea of progress that has emerged in our time. Moreover, even in the hey-day of the welfare state there were factors that suggested that the translation of industrial growth into social equality through national programs entailed some negative effects on social participation and individual development. The institutionalization of social rights through national bureaucracies produced a "clientism" and de-politicization that reinforced the channeling of expectations into private life defined on a consumerist model. The new citizen-identity as it emerged in the welfare state was thus subject to endemic forces undermining its efficacy from the outset. A contemporary renewal of social rights, and a renewed citizen-identity, must take its departure from the evident reality of our time that the expanding Fordist economy on which the welfare state was based cannot be recovered and also that national bureaucracies have a corrosive effect on political life.⁸ For these reasons, I will suggest that contemporary socialism must take up the minority tradition, more associated with utopian socialism and anarchism than either social democracy or revolutionary Marxism, that attempted to harmonize humanity with nature and sought human equality and

individual development outside of industrial growth. It is not a question of rejecting scientific and technological development, but of rejecting the ideology that such development should be conceptualized as a continuous "advance," such that critics are always charged with trying to "retard" technology or "return" to an earlier time. The issue is to assert the ethical principles of human equality, individual development and community as the criteria for what counts as an "advance" or progress, rather than expecting human goals to simply adjust to developments in science and technology. It is a question of what *type* of development and for what purposes.

In order to pose the question of how social rights and common property might be re-invented in our time, I want to begin by considering the relationship of the market to the whole range of human activities. Whereas revolutionary socialism attempted to abolish the market, and social democracy has accepted it in its present form, I think that our present task is how to displace, or push aside, the market from its domination of social life through its monopoly over the social representation of value. In this sense, my argument is a later, environmentalist version of the critique of the market elaborated by Marx.⁹ While the market may be expected to continue to exist, a central goal of democratic socialism must be that fewer and fewer subsistence needs be obtained through the market and, in general, that the market be subordinated to subsistence needs as defined through a community. A subsistence-oriented economy, unlike a market-driven one, has a decent chance at a sustainable relation to nature. This implies that the legislative activities of national and provincial states, cities and regions should be oriented toward enabling relatively independent, sustainable communities.¹⁰

The commodities that are exchanged on the market are defined through their *prices*. Only by having a price does a thing, being or activity become a commodity. And, through the relation between prices, it becomes essentially comparable to any other commodity. The market is the total system of relative prices and, as such, embodies within itself a system of universal comparability and relative value. In market-intensive

capitalist societies, the market is the central form of the social representation of value. You and I as individuals often regard a thing (such as a photograph of a dead friend or relative), a being (such as a human being, a household pet, or a wild goose), or an activity (such as running, growing vegetables, or making love) as having inherent, or *intrinsic value*—that is to say, a value good in itself.¹¹ But such values are not socially effective, they are "private" or "subjective" we say, because they do not enter into the effective social representation of value through the market. If they were to enter into the market by being assigned a price, their value would become socially recognized by becoming a *relative value* in comparison to other things, beings or activities. It would also raise the issue of how its social value, as represented by its price, has transformed its intrinsic value, the value that inheres in a thing, being or activity itself.

This poses a problem for environmental issues. If clean water, or wild geese, *do not have a price*, then their value is regarded as only a private or subjective affair. Thus, environmental issues are often posed in terms of an opposition between objective market value and non-market subjective or emotional values such that environmental concerns are seen as always interfering with, and retarding, the market. They are seen as entirely non-market goods whose only possible effectivity is through state regulation. On the other hand, if environmental goods *are* given prices, they become relative values defined by their price and, given enough time, one can expect that they will be reckoned less valuable than something else. If a park's value is reckoned by a price, then the condos are not far away.

The monopoly of the social representation of value through the market is thus a general problem for environmental issues. But it is not only environmental issues that are affected in this way. We all perform work that is not valued through a price, or wage. One of the main examples of unpaid labour is domestic work, mainly performed by women, but there is also yard work, fixing the car or children's toys, volunteer community work, shopping, and so forth.¹² While the market system of relative prices is

universal in the sense that any thing, being or activity can be assigned a price, it is in another sense partial. The market *abstracts from* the whole complex of things, beings and activities that define our practical life. It lifts one aspect out of its practical context and, considering it first in isolation, then sets it into the systemic relation with other aspects that constitutes relative value.

The point is that the market system does not, and cannot, represent the whole of practical life. It necessarily leaves out many things, beings and activities. More can always be added in, but the process can never be complete. This is because while the market is not extensionally limited—in principle, it can be extended to cover any new commodity—it is limited by the process of abstraction from which it begins. In abstracting from the whole complex of practical life, the market system thus continually raises the question of its applicability and effects in social life as a whole. It is this question that is encapsulated in the distinction between intrinsic value and relative value.

Even in high intensity market societies, the market relies upon, and affects, a multiplicity of other things, beings and activities which constitute the fabric of our social lives. The limitations of the social representation of value by the market is thus an important political issue in such societies. One way in which this issue has been posed is in terms of the relation between the market economy and the household in which the situation of women is crucial. Another, as I have already suggested, is in the environmental movement where the relation between the market economy and natural beings and cycles is crucial. There are, necessarily, many other examples. The argument that I am making in abstract terms refers to all situations in which the relative prices reckoned on the market intersect with the concrete, specific intrinsic values which constitute the quality of our everyday lives.

The project of democratic socialism thus requires that the market system be dislodged from its monopoly of the social representation of value. Social economists and critics have coined a number of terms—such as the informal economy, shadow work, or

subsistence economy—to refer to transactions that are not represented as prices.¹³ I will use the term *subsistence* to refer in the widest sense to all things, beings and activities in high-intensity market societies that are presupposed by, or ignored by, or outside, the market but that are nevertheless important to the lives of people within such societies. The term subsistence economy is thus a way of formulating the surrounding context within which the market operates and which it continually affects and re-organizes. While the market functions to re-organize subsistence around that which can be given a price, the goal of socialism is to subordinate price, or relative market value, to subsistence.¹⁴

Subsistence has three main components. One, there are those things, beings and activities which are necessary to the useful functioning of market-represented values, but are not themselves assigned prices. For example, the vegetables that I buy at the corner store have a price, but my buying activity itself does not, nor the walk home, nor the cooking, nor the eating. Two, there are those things, beings and activities that remain outside the market system. Traditional subsistence, such as growing and eating my own vegetables, would fall into this category as would inherent natural values such as wild geese and clean air. Three, there are those transactions that simply take place outside the market through barter or other informal exchanges. Subsistence represents the practical world defined by the intrinsic values of things, beings and activities which constitutes the actually experienced form of life, or the qualitative standard of living, of people in high-intensity market societies. The goal of democratic socialism is to increase the qualitative standard of living, or, in the widest sense, the ‘real wealth,’ of people as experienced in their subsistence.

There are several advantages to thinking in terms of subsistence economy, or practical use-value. It brings into consideration those activities important to the qualitative standard of living—such as cooking, housework or home repairs and improvements—that are usually invisible. Also, it allows us to reckon what is lost

through market exchanges in relation to what is gained. For many people, for example, taking a job to receive a wage requires enduring a long commute to work, frustration in traffic jams, and maintaining an expensive car. Some of these costs can be given a price and some cannot, but all must be reckoned against what is gained as a wage. Time lost in a commute that can't be spent with one's children will never find a price on the market, but it is not hard to understand that it has to do with their quality of life. Finally, the experience of 'need,' in Marx's sense, is rooted in subsistence and can provide the basis for an alternative ethic that can motivate socialist action.¹⁵

Because of the difference between market values and intrinsic values, market societies have always contained an opposing tendency to the reduction of values to the market. Following Karl Polanyi at this point, I will call such tendencies the "self-protective response of society."¹⁶ Such a response comes from those sectors of society who are threatened by market forces. Initially, it was mainly the aristocracy and the working class who enacted measures to limit and contain the market. The vehicle of this response was never confined to the nation-state—the working class's first response, for example, was to form unions—but was mainly institutionalized through regulation of the market by the nation-state. This is because, despite the near-monopoly of the social representation of value by the market, the nation-state became an arena for the articulation and representation of non-market values. The socialist ideal now requires an active dialogue with the new release of energies from contemporary social movements and identities that are proposing non-market values.

Actually-existing market societies are thus in tension between two conflicting tendencies. The dominant one tends to reduce all value to relative value represented by a price such that, to put it quickly, if it isn't represented by a dollar value, it isn't a real, or efficacious, need. A secondary, responsive tendency asserts intrinsic values against the market and looks for alternative forms in which they can be socially represented. The welfare state was one state of relative equilibrium between these two tendencies in which

the intrinsic values represented as social rights were effectively asserted through the regulative power of the nation-state. Actually-existing market societies are thus riven by a tension between market and community.

I mean the term "community" to refer to those collectivities who have sufficiently asserted intrinsic values against the market to constitute themselves as effective actors in the society. Thus, I do not define communities 'objectively,' or 'structurally,' in terms of their place within the social system. Rather, I define communities by their success at politically articulating a social identity against the exclusions endemic to the social system.¹⁷ A community allows for, and even encourages, a certain degree of internal differentiation. However, it does so against the backdrop of what is asserted as common. In this sense, a social movement not only pursues specific goals but also articulates a social identity which proposes a new commonality. The new commonalities engendered by social movements are the most vibrant current resource for the non-market values, internally-differentiated communities, and counter-hegemonic struggles that might re-invigorate the socialist ideal.

My claim is thus that community versus the market, not class versus class, is the main tension of contemporary market societies. And that communities assert themselves as identities, that is to say, as actors who constitute themselves in social spaces where market forces are slack, or have been pushed aside. Such 'spaces' may be actual spaces such as neighbourhoods or regions, but the term should be taken more generically. The women's movement operated, in part, through a re-articulation of domestic space and had consequences that could be derived from this re-articulation for public action. While each of these domestic spaces may be separate from the others, there is a metaphorical sense in which the women's movement constituted itself in a strategic 'space' available due both to its relative externality to market forces and to the welfare state assumption of the family wage as norm. Even in the environmental movement—where the tendency to take the 'space' in which social movements operate in the literal, geographically-delimited

sense of 'place' is strongest—the 'locality' in question is more a principle of connection than of separation, of traversal more than distance.¹⁸ While the tendency of the market is toward uniformity, the protective response is rooted in the re-articulations that occur in slack spaces, which are of necessity plural, as plural as the threatened intrinsic values which are discovered in these spaces.¹⁹

With the decline of the welfare state, the main community actors have become social movements. Their activism constitutes social identities which resist the relative values promoted by consumer society. The environmental movement, feminism, First Nations movements, urban reform, national and regional movements, gay and lesbian movements, and many more, have been the main forces whereby the market has been held back from entirely dominating society. Their assertion of intrinsic values, subsistence, and concrete experience has forged senses of community that have sustained us and which hold out the promise of renewing the project of democratic socialism.²⁰ They have done so, by and large, without being able to count on the nation-state for social protection from the market.

In my view, social movements need a political party to carry their intrinsic values into the larger political field and, indeed, to the nation-state. But they cannot be confined to a party. Indeed, the party of democratic socialism must largely take its impulse from such movements and become the arena in which the plurality of intrinsic values are debated and reconciled. The moral community that was asserted at the national level by the welfare state needs to be built up from other communities. It doesn't work if it is asserted directly and exclusively at the level of the nation-state, which is too large and impersonal a form of association.

The assertion of community by social movements thus provides the basis for assessing the qualitative standard of living of people as experienced in their subsistence that is the goal of democratic socialism. Communities propose new forms of the social representation of value that displace the monopoly of the market. It is in social

movements that identities are constructed that become countervailing powers to consumerism and clientism.²¹ However, contemporary social movements have been considered primarily as forces that occur outside work and economic production. The main tendency of capitalism has been to reduce necessary work through the introduction of technology and increasingly capital-intensive enterprises; thus it raises the spectre of increasing marginalization for many sectors of the population. And work, in the narrow sense of wage labour, or activity with a price, has become less central to the identity of citizens. But no more now than in the past can socialists consider work that gains a wage on the labour market the criterion of useful activity. If we bear in mind the argument that I have made for displacing the market, and consider work in the wide sense as all useful activity, it can be understood as the crucial link between human beings and nature, as that which transforms nature into a human environment.

It is through human activity that our identities are constructed. Activity that is undertaken in a community brings forth a social representation of its value that makes identity *social*—that puts it into relation with other actors and their activities. When we understand human activity as that which produces subsistence, or concrete well-being, its connexion to sustainability becomes clear. Unsustainable practices are tolerated because those who initiate them do not have to live with their consequences. Resources are depleted, natural cycles are violated, for reasons defined outside of a given community. If the profit goes out of the community, the sustainability of the enterprise ceases to be an issue. But communities must live with the consequences of their actions; they have nowhere else to go, unless they simply cease to exist. Thus, economic activity, and markets, become destructive when they cease to be local, that is, based in a community which both reaps the rewards *and* lives with the consequences.

There is thus an important link between the emphasis on locality in sustainable economics and the idea of work as useful activity oriented to subsistence, rather than wage labour. In this way, one can break down the apparent opposition between human

action and nature that often appears in environmentalists and anti-environmentalists alike. The prior condition for this synthesis is a critique of the social representation of value by the market and an opening up to new social representations of value in the communities asserted by social movements. The principles and practicality of a sustainable society have been much debated in recent years. Without entering into the details of that debate here, there are two main respects in which the idea of a sustainable society makes an important contribution to contemporary socialism. First, while the idea that human activity can ever be entirely in 'harmony' with nature may well be an over-simplification, it is a definitive break with the Enlightenment idea that greater domination of nature is the vehicle of greater human equality. Posing the issue in terms of a form of human production that is sustainable in the long term in relation to natural cycles and processes entails a break from the ideology of progress that assumes a linear advance or retreat in the domination of nature by science and technology. Second, it then becomes a question of what forms and kinds of human productive use of nature do not destroy their natural basis. Thinking in this way means that both the types of productive relation to nature and their human purposes become amenable to ethical-political evaluation. The idea of sustainable society thus necessarily asserts the priority of ethical-political evaluation over material progress and in this respect returns us to the deeply ethical impulse of socialism from its infatuation with industry.

While it is an important ideal, the idea of a sustainable society as a steady-state relationship between humans and nature has one crucial drawback: to decide that a policy or social arrangement is sustainable in this sense would require an extensive knowledge of natural systems and the impact of social organizations on them. Thus, it would seem to imply that decisions be taken by an army of natural and social scientists. Such a high knowledge requirement would undermine democratic participation in decision-making. Moreover, even in the apparently optimal case of highly informed decision-making by a scientific and technical elite, knowledge is necessarily limited to those studies that have

already been done. New impacts on nature by technical innovations, by accumulation of isolated impacts, and by new forms of social organization would still necessarily introduce imbalances into the human-nature relationship. Scientific knowledge of problems necessarily lags behind the identification of those problems themselves. To state it quickly, the knowledge requirement of steady-state sustainability is both too high to be realistic and contains an unfortunate undemocratic implication.

But it is not necessary to interpret sustainability in terms of a positive steady-state relationship between humans and nature. The idea of sustainable society arose in the context of an environmentalist critique of many of the practices of industrial society as being *unsustainable*. While sustainability is hard to define, unsustainability is much easier to spot and demands remedial action, if not an ultimate remedy. We should therefore understand sustainability as *not-unsustainability*, as based in a criticism of unsustainable practices (for which we do have compelling evidence) and as proposing new practices which are, at minimum, less unsustainable than current ones. Such practices will need to be worked out in local contexts in relation to the subsistence of the local population. For this, democratic participation is essential since subsistence wealth, unlike prices, can only be defined by participants.

Human activity in making useful things can thus be made sustainable in relation to nature if the market is displaced from its monopoly on the social representation of value. Democratic participation in local, subsistence activities oriented to sustainable practices can provide another form for the social representation of value that might vie with the market to generate new forms of the self-protective response of society. This perspective does not imply that the market need be abolished, nor that it need be accepted in its current form. It implies that the market be displaced from its monopoly and re-embedded in sustainable, subsistence-oriented practices. In many cases, community and government intervention is necessary to protect local and regional markets from global ones. The right to a revenue, the right to make a living, means the right to participate in

the social representation of value. This would be a new form of common property. On this basis, workers, as citizens, could participate fully in the rights and responsibilities of society in a new form by creating spaces for independent community action within the nation-state.

The route to realizing such an subsistence-oriented socialism is itself diverse. Socialism has tended to limit itself to solutions either through the socialization of industry or redistribution by the nation-state. But the diversity of subsistence, articulated through democratic processes that socially represent value, suggests that there is not a single solution to the domination of human activity by the market and its siphoning off of locally produced value by international money circuits. The goal is to promote and rely upon diverse and interconnected forms of economic activity, whose goal is the development of subsistence wealth and useful human activity, that maximize their travel through local circuits and therefore maintain community employment.²²

Quickly, I will mention some possibilities, but their purpose is simply illustration, not the setting out of strategic goals—which must be a consequence of a much larger debate. Community control of investment through credit unions, if possible combined with legislation forcing banks toward the devolution of investment decisions, would be a component. Diverse forms of ownership of local enterprises is also important. Social ownership through municipal and community boards, worker control, small business, and many other forms can all promote a diverse and sustainable local economy.²³ Flexibility in the work day, including job-sharing and part-time jobs with full benefits, would allow a dedication of an increasing share of one's time to subsistence—rather than being faced with a 'choice' between full-time wage labour or unemployment.

It is not likely within the foreseeable future that the global market will subside. I have argued that it is the task for contemporary socialism to build alongside it sustainable, subsistence-oriented local economies that hold out the possibility of withdrawing from dependence on global capital. The transition period will likely be very

long, but the task is to build within the shell of the old society the incipient forms of the new, and to await the moment when it is demonstrated in the daily lives of citizens that their survival requires a break with the global market.²⁴

There will remain a role for the welfare state—and the assertion of social rights, common property and community through the nation-state—for the foreseeable future, but the dynamic has now moved elsewhere and it is a failure if the Left allows itself to be limited to a defence of the welfare state. It is only by reconstituting community in new forms, from the ground up, within cooperative forms of self-organization that we can form the social relations that might sustain us in the moment when we are abandoned to environmental ruin and social marginalization by the shiny forces of globalization. These forces will indeed abandon us in the moment when it becomes more profitable to do so. At that time, we need to be prepared with an alternative conception of property, wealth and citizenship that could extend the achievements of the welfare state into a new stage. In my view, subsistence and sustainability must be the watchwords of this new socialist ideal.

Notes:

¹ Perhaps these comments also clarify that this is not really an ‘academic’ essay. (Most of the footnotes have been added at the insistence of a reviewer.) It attempts to speak to other socialists about the commitments that underpin many of our daily activities. It is important that this discussion emerge because the thread of socialist tradition has been broken and it is up to us to re-establish it. There are very few places for this discussion to take place in the present climate. *Studies in Political Economy* is an important remaining one. I would be interested in all genuine, non-polemical responses to the present essay at iangus@sfu.ca.

²T. H. Marshall, "Citizenship and Social Class" in *Class, Citizenship and Social Development* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1965) p. 78.

³C. B. Macpherson, "A Political Theory of Property" in *Democratic Theory: Essays in Retrieval* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973) p. 131, cf. 12, 91, 134, 181.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 132.

⁵ Nancy Fraser, "Gender Equity and the Family Wage: A Postindustrial Thought Experiment," in Seyla Benhabib (ed.) *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

⁶ See Patricia J. Mills, *Nature, Women and Psyche* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987).

⁷ Peter Kropotkin, *Fields, Factories and Workshops of Tomorrow* (New York: Harper, 1974) p. 26.

⁸This statement requires a crucial qualification. While bureaucracies, when they seek to handle public problems, produce a depoliticizing, and thus undemocratic, clientism, nevertheless, there is a necessary task for public welfare, and that in practice probably means bureaucracy, in assuring the preconditions—such as health, nutrition and education—for social and political participation.

⁹ For a detailed argument that attempts to sustain this assertion, see Ian Angus, *A Border Within: National Identity, Cultural Plurality and Wilderness* (Montréal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997) pp. 176-97.

¹⁰ It is important to recall here that 'independent' does not mean 'separate' or 'isolated.' See the discussion of 'community' below.

¹¹ The notion of intrinsic worth, or value, is widespread in environmentalist discourse, where it is used as an opposite to instrumental value, in the way that an end is opposed to a means, for example. The most influential version is probably by Arne Naess, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*, trans. David Rothenberg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) *passim*. My formulations here suggests that the ascription of inherent or instrumental values are not themselves intrinsic—that is to say, that it is the market that defines (socially) a value as instrumental, though that which has no market value may be either intrinsic or worthless. This is the difficulty, which is not conceptual but has to do with the social role of the market, that I discuss here.

¹² The issue of unpaid work is a persistent, if not front-and-centre, theme in both environmental and feminist discourses. For discussions which connect them, see Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Development* (London: Zed Books, 1988) and André Gorz, *Capitalism, Socialism, Ecology*, trans. Chris Turner (London and New York: Verso, 1994).

¹³ See, for example, Ivan Illich, *Shadow Work* (Boston and London: Marion Boyars, 1981); Alejandro Portes, Manuel Castells and Lauren A. Benton, *The Informal Economy* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989); and Claus Offe and Rolf G. Heinze, *Beyond Employment*, trans. Alan Braley (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992).

¹⁴I hope that this phrasing avoids a possible misunderstanding of the perspective that I am advocating. Unwaged labour has often been, for that very reason, a source of dependence and exploitation and, in many cases, access to wage labour has been a liberating experience. Similarly, giving environmental goods a price would give them some standing in the market. Nevertheless, I am arguing that the real locus of wealth is in subsistence and that the transformation of work into wage labour has intrinsic limitations.

¹⁵ Carolyn Merchant, for example, describes ecofeminism as a critique of the market economy that suggests 'partnership,' both with other humans and with nature, as an alternative ethic. See *Radical Ecology: The Search for a Livable World* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992) pp. 183-8. Other writers have suggested an ethic of care. Cf. William Leiss, *Under Technology's Thumb* (Montréal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990) chapter 13. Others still have suggested 'respect.' Cf. Ian Angus, *A Border Within*, pp. 160-70. The current point is that all of these alternatives depend upon a displacement of the market from its monopoly of the social representation of value.

¹⁶Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971).

¹⁷ This definition is based upon a judgment that, in the literature on new social movements, the 'identity paradigm' is superior to, not only the 'resource mobilization' paradigm, but to any perspective that defines the goals of social movements in terms of specific and limited objectives, thereby failing to note the sense in which goals always exceed limited purposes and take on a 'utopian,' universal dimension. This excessiveness, which might be characterized as a failure to accept political 'realism,' should be rather understood as the point at which the universalizing aims of social movements break out of their 'place' in the system to re-define the system as a whole and, thereby, to circumscribe it within defined limits. Two main texts of the 'identity paradigm' are Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (London and New York: Verso, 1985) and Alain Touraine, *The Return of the Actor*, trans. Myrna Godzich (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988). My version of the 'identity paradigm' is used to develop an analysis of Left nationalism in Canada in *A Border Within*, chapter 2.

¹⁸ I have explored the difference between 'place' and 'locality' and its relevance to social movements in "Locality and Universalization: Where is Canadian Studies?" in *Journal of Canadian Studies* Vol. 35, No. 3, Fall 2000.

¹⁹ Understanding contemporary capitalist society as a community-market tension in this way, as opposed to the Marxist 'class contradiction,' has the advantage of not counterposing an earlier, supposedly universalist movement to later 'identity politics.' It would be too much to say that there has been no change here, but the present analysis underlines the particular origins of all movements and the universalizing performed in attaining hegemony in a way that undercuts those who would regard the difference as fundamental. For an example of the latter polarization, which prevails both among identity theorists and class theorists, see Nancy Fraser, "From Redistribution to Recognition? Dilemmas of Justice in a 'Postsocialist' Age," in *Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the 'Postsocialist' Condition* (New York and London: Routledge, 1997).

²⁰ I have addressed the role of identities constructed in new social movements for a politics of social inclusion in "Post-colonial Federalism: Social Citizenship and New Identities" in Claude Couture (ed.) *Federalism, Identities and Nationalism* (forthcoming).

²¹ For an analysis of the role and strategies of social movements in disrupting consumer social identity, see Ian Angus, *Primal Scenes of Communication: Communication, Consumerism and Social Movements* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000) part three.

²²This perspective is often called "community economic development." See, for example, Burt Galaway and Joe Hudson (eds.), *Community Economic Development: Perspectives on Research and Policy* (Toronto: Thompson, 1994) and David P. Ross and Peter J. Usher, *From the Roots Up: Economic Development as if Community Mattered* (Toronto: James Lorimer, 1986).

²³See Diane Elson, "Market Socialism or Socialization of the Market" in *New Left Review*, 172, Nov. - Dec. 1988 and "The Economics of a Socialized Market" in Robin Blackburn (ed.) *After the Fall: The Failure of Communism and the Future of Socialism* (London and New York: Verso, 1991).

²⁴A global market is, in a certain sense, still compatible with the perspective outlined here. But it should be a market in non-necessities, a market from which subsistence is gradually withdrawn. Another possibility is that 'fair trade'

principles could be established between equal regions and nations. For such equality to be viable, however, it would seem to require the possibility of opting out, which would require that this option be a practical possibility. Thus, I conclude that subsistence should be, to the greatest possible extent, satisfied in a non-market fashion. This is an ideal, on must recall, not a plan. Also relevant here is that a 'necessity' would be so defined by political deliberations and would become debatable as the price of 'independence.' Thus, while 'independence' does not mean 'isolation,' it does seem to imply the practical possibility of separation—even if the price be high and only contemplated in the extreme case.