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## George Orwell and the Incoherence of Democratic Socialism

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Abstract: George Orwell's famous fictions, *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen-Eighty Four* were intended to advocate democratic socialism by portraying undemocratic forms of socialism as totalitarian. For Orwell, democracy was a political institution which would limit the abuse of power. But there are several problems with democratic socialism which ensure its failure. In Orwell's novel *A Clergyman's Daughter*, Orwell's views of economics and politics are inconsistent and conflicting in a way that ensures democratic socialism will not succeed on Orwell's terms. Democratic socialism in general is criticized according to F. A. Hayek's *Road to Serfdom* and John Jewkes's *The New Ordeal by Planning*, whose arguments differ crucially from those against market socialism by Andrei Shleifer and Robert W. Vishny. An economic analysis of the political institutions of democratic socialism shows that democratic socialism must necessarily fail for political (not economic) reasons even if nobody in authority has ill-intentions or abuses their power.

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Few anti-communist works are more famous than those by George Orwell. The language and expressions of *Animal Farm* (Orwell 1945) and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (Orwell 1949) are so well-known that they have entered common currency<sup>1</sup> and these two fictions are sometimes assigned by conservatives as *the* quintessential refutations of socialism and communism. But in fact, Orwell was an avowed socialist and his two famous fictions could not possibly have been intended to controvert socialism. Several recent works have attempted to rehabilitate Orwell's status as a socialist and reexamine his famous fictions accordingly.<sup>2</sup>

One author has recently argued that *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* were intended as arguments against non-democratic forms of socialism, meant to illustrate what the future may bring if socialism were to be implemented absent the institutions of Western democracy.<sup>3</sup> According to this interpretation, Orwell held that democracy was essential as a political-institutional means preventing

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1 Howe 1982: 98; Calder 1974: 154f.; Deutscher 1974: 119.

2 Makovi, "George Orwell as a Public Choice Economist"; Makovi, "Two Opposing Economic-Literary Critiques of Socialism"; Roback 1985; Crothers 1994; White 2008; Newsinger 1999. The author thanks Christopher Fleming, a doctoral candidate in economics at George Mason University for the reference to that obscure essay by Crothers.

3 Makovi, "George Orwell as a Public Choice Economist."

the abuse of power in a socialist state. These fictions by Orwell therefore imply a normative position favoring democratic socialism.

This essay will seek to criticize the tenability and coherence of Orwell's proposal. The question is, could democratic institutions actually succeed in preventing socialism from turning totalitarian? While it is true that neither socialism in general nor democratic socialism in particular are very popular amongst economists anymore, the fact remains that eminent scholars in many academic fields continue to either advocate socialism or at least concede that socialism would be not altogether bad. Therefore, while criticism of socialism may appear outmoded to the economist, it should still be quite timely for the practitioners of other fields.

This essay will attempt to demonstrate that no, democracy cannot curb the totalitarian potential of socialism, that democratic socialism must inevitably prove a political failure, both on Orwell's terms and in general. Democratic socialism must inevitably fail even absent the abuse of power, due instead to the inherent economic logic of the socialist system. But note that by “socialism”, we have a very specific meaning in mind: public or common ownership of the means of production.<sup>4</sup> This was the classical meaning of “socialism” as intended by socialists themselves. What this definition of socialism does *not* encompass is “interventionism”, meaning government regulation and taxation of essentially private enterprise. The mixed-economy is *not* socialist insofar as ownership of the means of production remains private, with production dictated largely by prices. Of course, at a certain point, interventions become so extensive that they amount to *de facto* nationalization. Nominally, property remains private, but the government dictates its permissible and mandatory uses to such an extent that private ownership is a legal fiction and the government owns the property for all intents and purposes. This was the situation in National-Socialist Germany. But in most mixed-economies today – especially since the period of deregulation and the “Washington Consensus” - this point is not anywhere near being reached. For this reason, France and Britain until a few decades ago would have been considered largely socialist, due to their large degree of nationalization of industry, whereas Sweden at the same period would *not* be considered socialist, because in Sweden, relatively few industries were owned by the government, and instead, the Swedish system relied predominately on redistribution of wealth that had been earned with relatively little regulation (Stein 1991, Sanandaji 2011).<sup>5</sup> By socialism then we do

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4 I thank Willem J. A. van der Deijl for forcing me to clarify this point.

5 The measures of economic freedom compiled by the Fraser Institute under its Economic Freedom of the World index lead one to the same conclusion. For any given year, Sweden has – compared to its contemporaries – tended to have low levels of regulation, low trade-barriers, and high degrees of protection of private-property, tempered by high levels of taxation and redistribution. This is *not* socialism as we or classical socialists have defined it.

*not* mean high levels of taxation and an extensive system of redistributory welfare payments. Instead we mean command-and-control, either by outright government ownership or else by regulations so extensive that *de facto* they amount to outright government ownership.

That democratic socialism will fail on Orwell's terms is shown by examining Orwell's 1935 novel *A Clergyman's Daughter* (1935b). The argument that it will fail in general will follow the arguments of F. A. Hayek's *Road to Serfdom* (2007 [1944]) and John Jewkes's *New Ordeal by Planning* (1968 [1948]), which offer arguments against democratic socialism crucially different than those of Andrei Shleifer and Robert W. Vishny's well-cited 1994 article, "The Politics of Market Socialism." Hayek and Jewkes rely less than Shleifer and Vishny do on the possibility that political officials will misuse their power.

### I. Orwell as a Democratic Socialist

First, we should acquaint ourselves with the terms by which Orwell advocated democratic socialism. According to Orwell's essay "Why I Write" (1946),

The Spanish war and other events of 1936-37 turned the scale and thereafter I knew where I stood. Every line of serious work that I have written since 1936 has been written, directly or indirectly, *against* totalitarianism and *for* democratic Socialism, as I understand it. (Orwell 2002: 1083f.; emphasis in original)

In his essay "The Lion and the Unicorn: Socialism and the English Genius" (1941a), Orwell advocated the

Nationalization of land, mines, railways, banks, and major industries. . . . The general tendency of this program aims quite frankly at turning . . . England into a Socialist democracy." (Orwell 2002: 334)

Notice that for Orwell, "socialism" does not mean a high degree of taxation or an extensive system of welfare payments. It means government ownership of the means of production. Socialism is command-and-control, and the mixed-economy of today is not socialism. But in the same essay, Orwell hastened to point out that

"[C]ommon ownership of the means of production" is not in itself a sufficient definition of Socialism. One must also add the following: approximate equality of incomes (it need be no more than approximate), political democracy, and abolition of all hereditary privilege, especially in education. These are simply the necessary safeguards against the reappearance of a class-system. Centralized ownership has very little meaning unless the

mass of the people are living roughly upon an equal level, and have some kind of control over the government. “The State” may come to mean no more than a self-elected political party, and oligarchy and privilege can return, based on power rather than money. (Orwell 2002: 317; cf. White 2008: 84.)

Elsewhere, Orwell wrote similarly that

Socialism used to be defined as “common ownership of the means of production,” but it is now seen that if common ownership means no more than centralized control, it merely paves the way for a new form of oligarchy. Centralized control is a necessary pre-condition of Socialism, but it no more produces Socialism than my typewriter would of itself produce this article I am writing. (Orwell 1935a in Orwell 2002: 926.)

Orwell even argued that by virtue of their undemocratic and collectivist nature, Nazi fascism and Soviet communism were essentially the same thing, a fact which he accused his fellow socialists of failing to appreciate:

[T]ill very recently it remained the official theory of the Left that Nazism was “just capitalism.” . . . Since nazism was not what any Western European meant by socialism, clearly it must be capitalism. . . . Otherwise they [the Left] would have had to admit that nazism *did* avoid the contradictions of capitalism, that it *was* a kind of socialism, though a non-democratic kind. And that would have meant admitting that “common ownership of the means of production” is not a sufficient objective, that by merely altering the structure of society you improve nothing. . . . Nazism can be defined as oligarchical collectivism. . . . It seems fairly certain that something of the same kind is occurring in Soviet Russia; the similarity of the two regimes has been growing more and more obvious for the last six years. (Orwell 1941b: 1684; emphasis in original)<sup>6</sup>

But for Orwell, the solution to the problem of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*'s “oligarchical collectivism” was democracy: in his “Review of *Russia Under Soviet Rule* by N. de Basily” (1939) he wrote that

The essential act is the rejection of democracy - that is, of the underlying values of democracy; once you have decided upon that, Stalin - or at any rate something *like* Stalin - is already on the way. (Orwell 2002: 111; emphasis in original)

Likewise, in a letter to Noel Willmet (18 May 1944), Orwell wrote (1944a: 232) that

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<sup>6</sup> I am indebted to Christopher Fleming for bringing this rarely-cited essay of Orwell's (1941b) to my attention.

Everywhere the world movement seems to be in the direction of centralised economies which can be made to “work” in an economic sense but which are not democratically organised and which tend to establish a caste system.

Thus, Orwell thought that the totalitarianism of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* would result if socialism were to be implemented without democracy. But democratic socialism, Orwell thought, would prevent the abuse of power and ensure that socialism would operate as intended. We will proceed to criticize Orwell and argue that in fact, democracy would do little to solve the problem.

## II. *A Clergyman's Daughter*

We will first critique the coherence and tenability of democratic socialism on Orwell's own terms by examining one of Orwell's lesser-known novels, *A Clergyman's Daughter* (1935b). This procedure may appear unorthodox but it will turn out to bear some very interesting and probably unexpected results. This novel, published in 1935, tells the story of Dorothy Hare, the daughter of a clergyman who becomes suddenly stricken with amnesia, forgetting her identity and losing her religious faith. With no livelihood or memory of home, she begins to wander from town to town in search of employment. Eventually she becomes an elementary schoolteacher but she discovers that the headmistress - Mrs. Creevy - has quite different ideas than herself about what constitutes a good-quality education. The education offered is a ridiculous sham, very similar to how Orwell described his own childhood education in his famous autobiography, “Such, Such Were the Joys” (Orwell 1939-1948). This consisted mostly of rote memorization and handwriting practice, and according to Mrs. Creevy,

What you've got to get a hold of once and for all . . . is that there's only one thing that matters in a school, and that's the fees. As for all this stuff about “developing the children's minds,” as you call it, it's neither here nor there. It's the fees I'm after, *not developing the children's minds*” (Orwell 1935b in Orwell 2009: 490; emphasis in original).

Orwell departs from his novel's fictional narrative and proceeds to deliver a page-long non-fictional disquisition on the evils of private education. He argues that “there is the same fundamental evil in all of them; that is, that they ultimately have no purpose except to make money” (*ibid.* 493). “So long as schools are run primarily for money, things like this will happen” (*ibid.* 494). It would seem that part of Orwell's opposition to capitalism as an *economic* system was owed to his childhood experiences in a private school, where - so he claimed - the pursuit of profits led the school to offer a fraudulent

mockery of authentic education.

However, there is a critical flaw with Orwell's argument which undermines his advocacy for democratic socialism. As he himself makes plain in *A Clergyman's Daughter*, the reason Mrs. Creevy's school offered such pitiful education is *because that is what the parents actually desire*. Orwell himself has Mrs. Creevy declare, "Well, then, it's the parents that pay the fees, and it's the parents you've got to think about. Do what the parents want - that's our rule here" (*ibid.* 491). When Dorothy begins to rebel and authentically educate her pupils, the result is that not only Mrs. Creevy but even the parents themselves become furious with her. When the parents meet with Mrs. Creevy and Dorothy, they clearly side with Mrs. Creevy, not with Dorothy (*ibid.* 487f.). If Mrs. Creevy's school offers only an education that is pitiful and wretched, it is because that is actually what the parents want. Mrs. Creevy is not deceitful. This leads Orwell to remark, "No one controls or inspects them [the schools] except the children's parents - the blind leading the blind" (*ibid.* 495).

So Orwell himself admitted that Mrs. Creevy's school really was catering to the wishes of the customers. It's just that the customer was wrong. And we already know that Orwell advocated democratic socialism as the solution to the problems of both capitalism and totalitarian socialism (oligarchical collectivism) alike. Presumably then Orwell thought that democratic socialism would solve the problems of private education as well. So let us assume for the sake of argument that democracy really works, that it really gives the people what they want.<sup>7</sup> If so, then the parents will still procure precisely the education they want for their children. Even if all the schools are nationalized and their curricula propounded by the government, if democracy is an effective means of ensuring that the government satisfies the wishes of the people, then a democratic socialist country ought to produce exactly the same awful education as the private schools which Orwell scorned. After all, the same parents who pay fees to private schools are part of the electorate too. Since what the parents want - according to Orwell - is awful education, then if a public school is to offer true education, the government must provide the opposite of what the parents want. But if we want the government to provide the opposite of what the people want, why even have democracy? If we assume that democracy works in satisfying the people's demands, then democratic socialism will deliver exactly what the people want. But Orwell has already argued that this is the flaw with capitalism, that it gives the customer - who is wrong - what he desires. According to Orwell's logic, only an autocracy can provide true education, but this undermines his advocacy for democratic socialism. The only other possibility is that democracy does not really work at all, and that democratic socialism will *not* provide what the people want - viz. bad miseducation. Instead, so the argument would go, democracy will provide what

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. the "majority voting" model of democracy in Shleifer and Vishny 1994: 171.

the people do *not* want, *viz.* good education. This would solve the problem of private education, but it would overturn Orwell's argument that democratic socialism is the solution to the problem to *Animal Farm's* counter-revolution by the pigs or *Nineteen Eighty-Four's* oligarchical collectivism. Within the constraints of Orwell's depiction, we may conclude that either democracy really works and so democratic socialism will produce the same poor-quality education as capitalistic private schools do, or else democracy does not work and democratic socialism will produce the same despotic oligarchy which he portrays in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Orwell has thus argued himself into a corner.

### III. The Critique of F. A. Hayek and John Jewkes

There is another way we may criticize the coherence and tenability of democratic socialism, this time based on the writings of economists F. A. Hayek and John Jewkes. According to their shared interpretation, advocates of democratic socialism did not understand enough economics to appreciate how the political system would actually operate under a regime of democratic socialism. Indeed, Orwell naively stated, "In a Socialist economy these [economic] problems do not exist. The State simply calculates what goods will be needed and does its best to produce them" (1941a: 316) and according to Jennifer Roback (1985: 131.),

it is naive to assume, as Orwell seems to have, that planning an economy is a straightforward extension of the exercise of planning a family shopping list. . . . Orwell seemed to have no appreciation of the magnitude of the coordination problem that the price system attempts to solve.

By the same token, it is reasonable to suppose that Orwell would not have understood the Public Choice economic problems of a democratic implementation of socialism. Orwell thought that democracy would prevent the abuse of power by a socialist regime, but the criticisms of Hayek and Jewkes ought to make us skeptical of this claim. If Hayek and Jewkes are correct, then democratic socialism will fail not only on Orwell's terms, but for every advocate of democratic socialism in general. Hayek and Jewkes do not criticize the economics of socialism directly, but rather their analysis concerns the appropriateness of political institutions for an economic system.

But it should be realized that what Hayek and Jewkes primarily criticized was not interventionism or high levels of taxation or welfare, but command-and-control, government ownership of the means of production. Hayek's *Road to Serfdom* was a warning against the *de facto* nationalization-by-regulation of the National-Socialist regime in Germany and against the actual nationalization by Britain's Labour Party. Hayek was not primarily concerned with high levels of



taxation and redistribution absent high levels nationalization and regulation, such as we might find in Sweden. Therefore, the primary argument against Hayek, that the mixed-economy of today has failed to turn tyrannical as he warned it would, entirely misses the point of his argument because in fact, his warning was not about the mixed-economy at all. If there are valid arguments against the mixed-economy, these were not the subject of the *Road to Serfdom*.

It should be emphasized as well that Hayek's and Jewkes's criticism of democratic socialism is markedly different than the well-known and (relatively) recent criticism by Andrei Shleifer and Robert W. Vishny in their 1994 article, "The Politics of Market Socialism." According to them (Shleifer and Vishny 1994: 165f.), "Under all forms of market socialism ... politicians' objectives must determine resource allocation. Market socialists have traditionally assumed that politicians will assume an efficient resource allocation." Advocates of democratic or market socialism "all presume efficiency-maximizing politicians" (Shleifer and Vishny 1994: 167) and when they prescribe what a good government ought to do, they "presume that it actually wants to do so" (Shleifer and Vishny 1994: 167). Their criticism is essentially an application of the familiar and accepted conclusions of Public Choice to the system of democratic or market socialism (Shleifer and Vishny 1994: 168) and it basically predicts a failure of political institutions to create appropriate incentives or to prevent the abuse of power. But they explicitly state that while they are sympathetic to Hayek's criticisms, they will not adopt them (Shleifer and Vishny 1994: 170). Moreover, Shleifer's and Vishny's interpretation of what Hayek meant differs crucially from the present author's; according to them, Hayek "argued that democracy is impossible in a country where a single leader has all the power that comes with controlling capital" (Shleifer and Vishny 1994: 170). But as this essay will proceed to demonstrate, what Hayek thought was not that democratic socialism was impossible but that it would not lead to the desired consequences. Therefore, Hayek's argument deserves reexamination to discover what he really meant. Furthermore, Shleifer and Vishny concede that Hayek's work "made a relatively bigger impression on public opinion than on the economics profession" (Shleifer and Vishny 1994: 168). This is all the more reason to reopen the case. Finally, Shleifer and Vishny completely neglect the parallel contribution of John Jewkes. The arguments of Hayek and Jewkes against democratic socialism are intimately related even though Hayek's work is far more well-known than Jewkes's. In the *Road to Serfdom*, Hayek (2007 [1944]) cites an earlier edition of Jewkes's *The New Ordeal by Planning* (1968 [1948]), saying "[i]t is the best discussion known to me of a concrete instance of the phenomenon discussed in general terms in this book" (Hayek 2007 [1944]: 51). Meanwhile, for his part, Jewkes described Hayek's *Road to Serfdom* (2007 [1944]) as "masterly" (Jewkes 1968: xiii) for its "analysis which has never been confuted" (Jewkes 1968: 182 note). Therefore, Jewkes's criticism of democratic

socialism deserves notice, if for no other reason than the pursuit of intellectual history.<sup>8</sup> Hayek and Jewkes argue that the problem with democratic socialism is not that the government's priorities will be wrong or that it will use its power for improper intentions. Instead, and in contrast to Shleifer and Vishny, they argue that even a perfectly-intentioned government that uses its authority only to sincerely promote the ends of socialism, will nevertheless fail because the political institution of democracy is fundamentally incompatible with the economic needs of socialism. Therefore, Hayek and Jewkes sidestep the traditional concerns of Public Choice and instead point out completely different political-institutional problems with democratic socialism.

According to Hayek and Jewkes, the first problem with democratic socialism is with allocating labor efficiently. In a market economy, labor is allocated through differential wages. Wages rise or fall to equilibrate supply and demand for labor. Every form of labor has some market-clearing wage where that rate produces a stable equilibrium. But under socialism, where wages are either equal or approximately equal,<sup>9</sup> differential wage rates are unable to perform this allocational function. Strictly speaking, government ownership of the means of production does not require equality of wages, but it is hard to imagine why any socialist would desire government ownership of the means of production if workers remained such as socio-economically unequal as they were under capitalism. The purpose and intention of public ownership was primarily to promote equality, especially of wages, incomes, and living conditions. How then is the system supposed to efficiently choose who ought to fill which labor position? The only conceivable solution is some sort of rationing system, whereby the political system dictates by fiat who is to labor where. But a system of compulsory, involuntary employment is hardly compatible with the aspirations of democratic socialism.<sup>10</sup> According to John Jewkes's *New Ordeal by Planning*, “whatever the original intentions of the planners, compulsion of labour soon becomes

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8 I could not find any academic citations of Jewkes except for antiquated book reviews. Positive reviews of Jewkes include those by Grampp (1949), Levitan (1949), Mackintosh (1949), and Worcester (1978). Mixed reviews include Brown (1948), Harris (1949), and Lipson (1949). Negative reviews include Fischer (1949), Brewin (1950), Aldcraft (1968), Sutherland (1968), and Lewis (1969).

9 In “The Lion and the Unicorn,” Orwell said that socialism required only “approximate equality of incomes (it need be no more than approximate)” (Orwell 1941a in Orwell 2002: 317).

10 Two novels offer fictionalized illustrations of this economic principle concerning the allocation of labor under capitalism versus socialism: Eugen Richter's *Pictures of the Socialistic Future* (2010 [1891]) and Henry Hazlitt's *Time Will Run Back* (1966 [1951]). See Makovi, “Two Opposing Economic-Literary Critiques of Socialism.” And Cotton pointed out that in More's *Utopia* (1516), people rotate in an out of more desirable and less desirable occupations, and the truly onerous work is done by convicts and saints; apparently More had realized the allocational dilemma created by the abolition of differential wages.

inevitable. For how, otherwise can labour be got into the appropriate jobs?” (Jewkes 1968: 90). And further,

Labour is one of the resources which must be forced to fit into the [central economic planning] scheme as a whole. . . . [D]irection of labour is inevitably bound up with a plan courageously followed to its logical conclusion. . . . So long as the aim is a planned economy there can be no doubt of the trend of social pressures: it will be towards a progressive restriction in the choice of occupation. (Jewkes 1969: 191)<sup>11</sup>

And this was not mere idle and unrealistic theorizing by Jewkes, for

the British planners, against all their best instincts, were driven to the restoration of conscription of labour in 1947. . . . By the autumn of that year it was the law of land that (with the exception of a small proportion of the working population) no man between the ages of 18 and 50 years and no woman between the ages of 18 and 40 years could change his or her occupation at will. (Jewkes 1968: 191, 193)

Central economic planning in Great Britain logically required conscription and regimentation of all labor - corvée and serfdom - and the government did not shy away from this logical consequence for long. Unfortunately, conscription had been deemed essential in the recent war, but as Hayek noted, merely “six months later the same government found itself in peacetime forced to put the conscription of labor back on the statute book” (Hayek 2007 [1944]: 47).<sup>12</sup> Jewkes argued that this involuntary servitude was not a consequence of any despotic intent or moral depravity or abuse of power, but was dictated “by the logic of events” (Jewkes 1968: 193) and by “the inexorable demands of the plan” (*ibid.*). Likewise, according to Hayek, “[t]here is no better illustration [than this regimentation of labor] of the manner in which the inherent logic of their policies drove an unwilling socialist government into the kind of coercion it disliked” (Hayek 2007 [1944]: 47). In contrast to Shleifer and Vishny, the problem here with democratic socialism is not that the politicians have abused their power or that had wrong intentions or incentives. Even if the politicians are perfectly incentivized and well-intentioned, thoroughgoing and successfully-implemented democratic socialism, say Hayek and Jewkes, will still

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11 Cf. another work by the same author, Jewkes's 1978 *A Return to Free Market Economics?: Critical Essays on Government Intervention* 67, 70, 84. The last-cited page (Jewkes 1978: 84) notes that socialized medicine (specifically the British National Health Service) cannot guarantee true equality of access to medical care (which includes an egalitarian physical distribution of doctors) unless the government is “prepared to deprive doctors of freedom to operate in the district of their own choice.”

12 According to editor Bruce Caldwell (Hayek 2007 [1944]: 47 note 19), “Hayek refers to the Control of Engagement Order of 1947,” and his summary of that law makes it clear that he refers to the same law as does Jewkes.

turn out to become totalitarian.

Most astoundingly, Orwell himself seems to have lately realized this logical consequence. In Orwell's final edition of "London Letters" in the *Partisan Review* (11:3, summer 1946), Orwell argued (to quote Newsinger 1999: 139)

that in conditions of full employment if wages are evened out, workers will drift away from the more disagreeable jobs . . . Quite incredibly, he [Orwell] argued that socialists had to face up to the fact that "you had to make use of forced labour for the dirtier kinds of work."

Orwell apparently admitted what Hayek and Jewkes had said was the unintentionally totalitarian implication of socialism taken to its logical conclusion. One wonders how Orwell was able to state this openly and without self-consciousness, but Newsinger notes (1999:139) that "Labour Government on this occasion seems to have brought out the worst in him [Orwell]." Orwell admitted that central economic planning is impossible without what is essentially slavery. But then what freedom could there possibly be under democratic socialism? If central economic planning cannot work without conscription of labor, then democratic socialism amounts to letting the slave elect his slave-master without the freedom to leave the plantation.

So for a socialist government to be authentically socialist, it must assign everyone to his occupation without any freedom of employment. Otherwise, the government cannot by its own power ensure the plan will be implemented. Either a democratic socialist government will insist on this assignment procedure and become tyrannical despite being democratic, or else it will abandon the assignment procedure and permit freedom of employment, preserving democratic values at the cost of abandoning socialism. A compromise is possible, but because socialism and individual autonomy are at opposite poles and inversely proportional, the one must be sacrificed to the identical degree to which the other is not. It is no great consolation to the socialist to be told that any compromise between socialism and freedom is an exactly proportioned one, with exactly as much socialism as there is *not* freedom, and vice versa. Even the English socialist Maurice Dobb realized this dilemma and despaired of the possibility of maintaining freedom under socialism, saying, "Either planning means overriding the autonomy of separate decisions, or it apparently means nothing at all."<sup>13</sup>

There is another reason why democratic socialism must inevitably fail to curb the abuse of power or avert the totalitarian potential of socialism. This is based on the understanding that democracy is but a means to an end. As economists emphasize, means are not necessarily always appropriate for

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13 Quoted in Trygve J. B. Hoff 1981: 267.

given ends. According to Hayek, this is true of democracy as well:

Democracy is essentially a means, a utilitarian device for safeguarding internal peace and individual freedom. As such it is by no means infallible or certain. . . . [There is] the misleading and unfounded belief that, so long as the ultimate source of power is the will of the majority, the power cannot be arbitrary. . . . If democracy resolves on a task which necessarily involves the use of power which cannot be guided by fixed rules, it must become an arbitrary power. (Hayek 2007 [1944]: 110f.)<sup>14</sup>

Orwell himself had reviewed Hayek's *Road to Serfdom* (Orwell 1944b),<sup>15</sup> so he should have been familiar with what Hayek said. According to Hayek, in other words, democracy is but a means to the end of limiting power. But if the government's policy is one which necessarily relies on absolute political power to be implemented, then either democracy must be sacrificed to the policy, or the policy must be sacrificed to democracy. One cannot combine a policy of limiting government power via democracy on the one hand, with a socialist policy which necessarily requires unlimited government power to be implemented. It is not clear which will be subordinated to the other, but it is sure that one way or the other, one policy must prevail over the other. Even if democracy were somehow maintained under socialism it would still not accomplish its purpose, for the purpose of democracy is to limit power but a democratic socialist government would necessarily be an unlimited power insofar as it were socialist. An authentically socialist democratic socialism would at best be a tyrannical despotism which somehow succeeded in maintaining the outward trappings of democracy without maintaining anything of the spirit or intention of democracy. Once again, it would be something akin to giving a slave the power to elect his slave-master without giving him the freedom to escape the plantation.

As if this were not enough, there is in fact yet another another problem with democratic socialism. As Hayek argued,

Nor can a coherent plan be achieved by breaking it up into parts and voting on particular issues. A democratic assembly voting and amending a comprehensive economic plan clause by clause, as it deliberates on an ordinary bill, makes nonsense. An economic plan, to deserve the name, must have a unitary conception. Even if a parliament could, proceeding step by step, agree on some scheme, it would certainly in the end satisfy

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14 Cf. Boettke and Leeson 2002: 12. As for why socialism “necessarily involves the use of power which cannot be guided by fixed rules,” see Hayek, “Planning and the Rule of Law,” in Hayek 2007 [1944]: 112-23. The socialist Jacob Marschak (Hayek 2007 [1944]): 17) called this particular chapter “excellent and truly inspiring” (Hayek 2007 [1944]: 251).

15 For a discussion of this book review (Orwell 1944b), see Richman 2011.

nobody. A complex whole in which all the parts must be most carefully adjusted to each other cannot be achieved through a compromise between conflicting views. . . . Even if, by this expedient, a democracy should succeed in planning every sector of economic activity, it would still have to face the problem of integrating these separate plans into a unitary whole. Many plans do not make a planned whole. (Hayek 2007 [1944]: 106f.)

In other words, democracy cannot produce the unitary economic planning which socialism demands. Democratic socialism would furnish only a disjointed hodge-podge of contradictory laws and regulations which have no unifying theme or purpose. A transitory elected government composed of disagreeing factions cannot produce a coherent plan which can be expected to remain for the long-term. The reason why democracy may work well for a free-market economy is that the scope of the government's activities are relatively modest. The only laws which need to be passed are those regarding relatively uncontroversial matters such as banning murder and theft. It is not very hard to agree on what a “night-watchman” state ought to do; the scope of government activity is relatively small and the possibility for consensus is great.<sup>16</sup> It should not be too difficult for a democratic assembly to reach a nearly unanimous consensus that theft ought to be illegal, for example. In other words, the smaller the scope of government, the simpler the task of achieving democratic consensus. But the problem with achieving democratic consensus under socialism, says Hayek, is that “there exists no agreed view on what ought to be done” (*ibid.* 101) and “the probability that they [those attempting to achieve a democratic consensus] will agree on a particular course of action necessarily decreases as the scope of such action extends” (*ibid.* 103). “We may rely on voluntary agreement to guide the action of the state only so long as it is confined to spheres where agreement exists” (*ibid.* 103). But in pursuing a socialist policy, “democracy embarks upon a course of planning which in its execution requires more agreement than in fact exists” (*ibid.* 103). The problem is that under socialism, the agreement on the desirability of planning is not supported by agreement on the ends the plan is to serve. The effect of the people's agreeing that there must be central planning, without agreeing on the ends, will be rather as if a group of people were to commit themselves to take a journey together without agreeing where they want to go: with the result that they may all have to make a journey which most of them do not want at all. (*Ibid.* 104.)

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16 Cf. Buchanan's and Tullock's argument for qualified majority parliamentary voting in *Calculus of Consent* (1962). Buchanan's and Tullock's argument is not the same as the present author's, but it leads to a very similar conclusion. For reviews of Buchanan's and Tullock's argument, cf. Butler 2012: 95-100; Stevens 1993: 134-139; Hinich and Munger 1997: 100-103.

Indeed, John Jewkes shows that the central economic plans of Britain's Labour and Conservative parties were all mutually-contradictory.<sup>17</sup> Because no consensus can ever be reached, democratic socialism must and did essentially devolve into interest-group-lobbying, where every faction strives to funnel pork to its own constituents. As John Jewkes noted, the minister of a regime of central economic planning “will be subject to powerful pressure groups” which will “inevitably make him the guardian of some vested interest” (Jewkes 1968: 130). No coherent central plan can arise from this, according to Jewkes:

an integrated scheme must inevitably be examined by those whose interests and knowledge are essentially local and piecemeal. The plan will be subjected to distortion through the activities of pressure groups. (Jewkes 1968: 133; cf. *ibid.* 218)

And so the product of democratic socialism will be (to quote a statement made in an unrelated context) one big compromise, just like a bill in the Assembly that no one wants to pass but no one is willing to kill. The thing gets modified and diddled in committee until it's equally unacceptable to everyone. (“Thresher” 174)

Therefore, as Nicholas Capaldi and Gordon Lloyd have noted (2011: p. xxi, n. 4),

Marxists have always been rightly contemptuous of democratic socialism because shifting majorities literally makes even the façade of economic planning impossible.

In some respects, this part of the analysis by Hayek and Jewkes is similar to that of Shleifer and Vishny, but there are still important distinctions to be drawn. According to Shleifer and Vishny, the problem with democratic socialism is that it is vulnerable to the influence of pressure groups. Citing the familiar Public Choice literature, they argue that under democratic socialism, the government will cater to well-organized minority interests rather than promote the public good, creating economic inefficiencies.<sup>18</sup> They concede that the same problem exists under democratic capitalism, but they claim that the inefficiencies would be worse under democratic socialism (Shleifer and Vishny 1994: 172-174). To a large extent, Hayek's and Jewkes's prediction of distortion by pressure groups is very similar to the criticism by Shleifer and Vishny. However, there is an important nuance in Hayek's and Jewkes's argument which Shleifer and Vishny miss. Hayek and Jewkes do not merely argue that interest group lobbying will lead to more economic inefficiency under socialism than under capitalism. Instead,

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<sup>17</sup> Jewkes, “Confusion Among the Planners” in Jewkes 1968: 80-96; Jewkes, “Variety Among the Planners” in Jewkes 1978: 61-76.

<sup>18</sup> Shleifer and Vishny 1994: 171f., citing Olson 1965 and Becker 1983. I would add Stigler 1971; Posner 1974; Butler 2012: 36f.; Stevens 1993: 214-229.

Hayek's and Jewkes's argument is more fundamental: the very existence of any interest group lobbying at all is fundamentally at odds with the very essence of socialism. Central economic planning only makes sense if there is a unitary, consistent, coherent central plan. The very existence of conflicting interest groups, regardless of the magnitude of the inefficiency they engender, defeats the very purpose of socialism. One of the most fundamental Marxist criticisms of the market had been that the market economy is an “anarchy of production” which must be replaced with conscious, rational direction (Steele 1992: *passim*). Socialists found it unconscionable that the market was being driven by price-signals which seemed to emerge from nowhere. Only a consciously-designed system, they thought, was deserving of rational human beings. According to Steele, many socialists were concerned not only with inequality and poverty under capitalism but also with the fact that the market economy seemed irrational and inscrutable, violating the very essence of what it meant to be human. Therefore, Hayek's and Jewkes's criticism cuts closer to the heart of the matter than Shleifer's and Vishny's. Shleifer and Vishny predict greater economic inefficiency due to interest group lobbying under socialism than under capitalism, but conceivably, a socialist could be willing to tolerate greater economic inefficiency if this maximized other, more important goals, such as income equality. But according to Hayek and Jewkes, interest groups would produce not merely economic inefficiency but directionless and incoherent anarchy. Since it was (according to Steele) primarily the “anarchy of production” which led Marxists to reject the market economy in the first place, then if Hayek and Jewkes are correct, the problem of pressure groups under democratic socialism would defeat the single most important reason for having socialism at all.

And whereas Shleifer and Vishny rely on Mancur Olson (1965) and Gary Becker (1983) for their model of regulation, Hayek and Jewkes appear to have more in common with Kenneth Arrow's Impossibility Theorem.<sup>19</sup> Arrow showed that it is impossible to aggregate a multitude of individually ordinal and transitive preference functions into one single ordinal-transitive social preference function, and the only means by which the political preference function can satisfy all of Arrow's conditions is through dictatorship.<sup>20</sup>

For example, suppose we have three voters, 1, 2, and 3. And suppose each of these voters ranks

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19 After this author had already related Hayek and Arrow to each other on his own, he saw that Boettke and Leeson 2002 had preempted him. However, Boettke's and Leeson's discussion (2002) is more technical and it does not compare Hayek to Shleifer and Vishny (1994). So there may be value in rehashing the comparison between Hayek and Arrow, this time in more simple, straightforward terms and with relation to Shleifer and Vishny (1994). But the reader is urged to consult Boettke and Leeson 2002.

20 Butler 2012: 32; Stevens 1993: 47, 143-145; Hinich and Munger 1997: 95-99.



three different options, A, B, and C, in order of their preferences. We might have the following table of preferences by voter:

	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>
<u>Best</u>	A	B	C
<u>Middle</u>	B	C	A
<u>Worst</u>	C	A	B

Let us further suppose a pairwise voting rule, where we vote on two options against each other, and keep voting until one option consistently beats all others. This is called a Condorcet winner. First, we vote on A versus B. Voters 1 and 3 both prefer A to B, while voter 2 prefers B to A, so A wins two votes out of three. Then we vote on the winner, A, against C. Voters 2 and 3 prefer C to A, while voter 1 prefers A to C, so now C wins. But now we have to vote on C against B. Voters 1 and 2 prefer B to C, while voter 3 prefers C to B, so B wins. But now we are right back where we started: we have to vote on A versus B, and A will win. So we have no definitive winner. Our voting is afflicted with an infinite cycling problem because while the individual preference functions are transitive, the social preference function is not. Socially, A beats B and B beats C, but C beats A rather than A beating C. This is the so-called “Condorcet Paradox”, a very simple example of Arrow's Impossibility Theorem. Here, we have demonstrated cycling under pairwise voting, but Arrow showed mathematically that any possible voting rule whatsoever will be susceptible to one of several paradoxes. The problem is that given individually transitive and ordinal preferences, there is no mathematically-guaranteed way to aggregate them together into one social preference function that is free of paradoxes. The only way to avoid the paradoxes, according to Arrow, is through dictatorship since this avoids the need to aggregate individual preference functions into one social preference function.

It appears that the incoherence and instability of decision-making under democratic socialism as predicted by Hayek and Jewkes is but one manifestation of the general problem pointed out by Arrow. Hayek and Jewkes are not saying that pressure groups will create economic inefficiencies. Their criticism is more fundamental: the unitary, coherent, consistent plan demanded by socialism simply cannot be obtained under democracy, for the same reason Arrow has shown. Democratic socialism cannot work because there is no mathematical way to deduce societal preferences or the one and only “general will.” But socialism demands a single unitary plan. For example, if an infinite Condorcet cycle occurs in the legislature, then it will be impossible to conceive of a unitary, coherent central economic plan which expresses the will of the people. But without such a single, unitary plan, it is difficult to imagine what good socialism could be. The very essence of socialism is central economic planning. If that plan is not really a unitary plan at all, what good is it? And in contrast to democratic capitalism,

democratic socialism vastly increases the scope of political decision-making, making it more likely that a voting paradox will occur. Only dictatorship can reliably produce a paradox-free preference function, which would explain why socialism has tended to be totalitarian rather than democratic. The point here is not that democratic socialism must necessarily be dictatorial, but rather that it must be dictatorial in order to produce a unitary socialist economic plan. Contrariwise, democratic socialism may eschew dictatorship but in doing so, it creates the possibility that the central economic plan will be incoherent and random.

There is one final problem with democratic socialism according to Hayek and Jewkes. Even if somehow, against all odds, a democratic socialist government could successfully plan the economy without producing tyranny or totalitarianism, what would happen if during the next election, the people voted against the incumbent party? Some capital investments take years or decades to bear fruit, before they deliver the hoped-for return-on-investment. What if four years after a plan is inaugurated, a new party is elected and uproots that tree before it has had a chance to blossom? How could any economic coherence or consistency be maintained if elections constantly upend the entire economy? For “[l]ong-term industrial projects cannot flourish in such an environment of political uncertainty,” according to Jewkes (1968: 166). And how could democratic socialism be maintained if the people voted against socialism and in favor of a free-market? Or what if the people continued to vote for socialism in general, but chose to elect a competing, alternative socialist party with a central plan differing from that of the incumbent socialist party? How can a long-term economic plan be maintained if it is replaced every time a new party comes to power? As John Jewkes argued,

Even where one planning government is succeeded by another, sudden switches of policy are to be expected. . . . If the personnel of the supreme planning group changes, then disrupting and costly changes in policy will follow. Even greater dislocation is to be expected where a socialist government, committed to planning, is replaced by a non-socialist government which favours the free economy. So long as representative government is maintained this possibility cannot be ruled out. . . . The prospect is thus opened up of chaotic competition between rival plans. (Jewkes 1968: 166, 152, 166)

And so, said Jewkes, democratic socialism could not operate

Unless . . . the highly undemocratic assumption is made that the government will never change the political colour of its government. . . . There is no escape from a dilemma unless one party is has the courage of its conviction and, in the interests of the continuity of its economic programmes, deprives the electorate of the right to change the

government.” (Jewkes 1968: 152, 166f.).

In fact, some of the advocates of democratic socialism themselves did not shy away from this anti-democratic conclusion. As Hayek noted:

And to make it quite clear that a socialist government must not allow itself to be too fettered by democratic procedure, Professor Laski . . . raised the question “whether in a period of transition to Socialism, a Labour Government can risk the overthrow of its measures as a result of the next general election” - and left it significantly unanswered. (Hayek 2007 [1944]: 105)

And further,

Professor Laski [expressed] his determination that parliamentary democracy must not be allowed to form an obstacle to the realization of socialism . . . “the continuance of parliamentary government would depend on its [i.e. the Labour government's] possession of guarantees from the Conservative Party that its work of transformation would not be disrupted by repeal in the event of its defeat at the polls”! (Hayek 2007 [1944]: 105 n. 4)

To summarize, there are at least three reasons why democratic socialism would fail to keep a socialist regime from turning despotic and tyrannical: first, because without differential wages, labor cannot be allocated without politically assigning people to their employments. In other words, socialism requires the abolition of the freedom to choose one's own job. Otherwise, the government cannot ensure that the economic plan will be executed as intended. Second, because democracy is merely a means to the end of limiting power, but socialism necessarily requires unlimited power. The means and the end are incompatible and one must be sacrificed to the other. Third, because democracy results in shifting majorities and interest-group lobbying and pork-barrel politics. Democratic socialism would not produce the unitary, long-term, consistent planning which socialism demands. Not only would democratic socialism would fail to establish socialism as Orwell desired, but it would fail just as well by the standards of any other democratic socialist as well even with the assumption that political power is never abused. Contrary to Andrei Shleifer and Robert W. Vishny, the problem with democratic socialism is not only that those in power would have the wrong intentions or have an incentive to abuse their power, nor is the problem only that pressure groups create economic inefficiencies. According to Hayek and Jewkes, democratic socialism cannot work as socialists intend even if those in power have the best of intentions and never abuse their power. And the existence of pressure groups under

democratic socialism would not merely produce economic inefficiencies – which a socialist could conceivably accept as an acceptable price to pay for the achievement of other goals – but the problem of pressure groups would more fundamentally undermine the very purpose of socialism. Democracy is incompatible with socialism's demand for a single, unitary economic plan, and as Hayek and Arrow showed, achievement of that plan is not possible without dictatorship.

#### IV. Conclusion

Orwell placed his hopes and dreams for a better future for mankind in socialism. At the same time, he saw that socialism threatened to produce the oligarchical collectivism of *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Therefore he advocated democratic socialism as the means of preventing the abuse of power by those in charge of the socialist government. Unfortunately for Orwell, democratic socialism could never function as he imagined. From our analysis of Orwell's novel, *A Clergyman's Daughter*, we saw that Orwell blamed private education for giving parents exactly what they wanted for their children. The problem is that if democracy works, then public education under democratic socialism would produce exactly the same results as capitalistic private education. And if democracy does not work, then we are right back in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. At least, this is so within the context of Orwell's own thoughts and writing. If this does not refute democratic socialism *per se*, it at least demonstrates an inconsistency within Orwell's own works.

Meanwhile, as long as the economic system was truly socialist, then democratic socialism must necessarily turn totalitarian and tyrannical even without any abuse of power, or else it must be random and incoherent insofar as it avoids dictatorship. It must be emphasized that nowhere has this analysis contested Orwell's hypothesis that democracy would successfully limit the abuse of power. Even if democratic institutions completely succeed in preventing those in authority from abusing their power, a socialist democracy must nevertheless turn totalitarian insofar as it is socialist. For a socialist economic plan - especially the most sincerely socialist plan where power is never abused - cannot be implemented without conscription of labor - in other words, slavery. And because democracy is but a means to limit power whereas socialism necessarily requires unlimited political power, either socialism would have to be sacrificed for the sake of democracy, or the reverse. Even if democracy were somehow maintained with socialism, either one or the other would in reality consist merely of the outward trappings without any of the substance. Either democracy would be sham, the freedom to elect one's despotic overlords, or else socialism would be a fraud, nothing but a disorder of chaotic interest-group jockeying and pork-barreling without any of the coherent or consistent rhyme or reason worthy of any authentic economic plan. As Hayek and Arrow showed in their own ways, achievement of a

coherent, unitary economic plan is possible only under dictatorship. If socialism avoids dictatorship, then it must eschew unity of purpose and plan as well, but this defeats the purpose of socialism. All of this applies not only to George Orwell but even of nearly any advocate of democratic socialism whatsoever, all without assuming any abuse of power whatsoever.

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