



## Organian



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### Location

SF Bay Area, California,

### Bio

Banner courtesy of RicTresa, OS blogger and graphic artist extraordinaire - thank you, Ric! I am a middle-aged professional woman who needs to remain anonymous on the web for job-related reasons. I used to be a hippie peacenik, and still am a socialist. If you like my blog posts and/or my comments on those of others, I strongly encourage you to check out the link below under "My Political Matrix." Thanks for looking!

### MY RECENT POSTS

From Occupy Wall Street to a General Strike Movement!  
January 23, 2012 02:56AM

Abolishing Corporate Personhood Is Not Enough!  
January 23, 2012 02:33AM

Disappointed in Obama?  
December 09, 2010 12:04AM

Obama's Health Care Reform: Neither Health Care Nor Reform  
August 14, 2010 09:47PM

March 4 Update: Demands  
January 24, 2010 01:03PM

### MY RECENT COMMENTS

"A longer analytical article on the Occupy movement can be found in the current is..."  
April 19, 2012 07:44PM

"Carla: Thank you for your comment. I would be a lot more impressed, if not for th..."  
April 19, 2012 07:36PM

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NOVEMBER 22, 2008 6:56PM

## What I Mean by "Socialism"

**RATE:** 9

There is a lot of confusion and misunderstanding about what "socialism" means, particularly among Americans, who generally have no direct experience even with the faint echo of it that can be discerned in European-style social democracy. (See [Charles Rachlis's post "Why do Americans Hate Socialism?"](#) and the comments on it.) And even people who have studied political science or have experience in anti-capitalist political movements may define it differently. I want to lay out here an outline of what I mean by the term, so I can refer back to it as I continue to discuss related issues. (For another, more extended effort at defining the term, with which I basically agree, see the article "Socialism: What It Is - What It Is Not" that is linked under the Marxism menu on [this site](#).)

I do not pretend that my definition is complete, definitive, or even correct. I just want people who read this and future blog entries to be clear on what I mean by the term. Also, I want to be clear that in defining the term, **I am deliberately and consciously avoiding – for the moment – any discussion of whether it is a realistic possibility, or how we could get there from here.** Those are much harder questions; I want to start with the easier ones first.

It may not be necessary to do this for the OS audience (with the exception of [one-shot poster funkyhut](#)), but I do want to get one misconception out of the way right at the start. Socialism, as I use the term, is **not** what existed in Soviet Russia, even before Stalin, or in China, even under Mao (nor, for that matter, is communism). Socialism is not the same as the "social-democratic" capitalism that exists in Scandinavia and some other parts of Europe today. However the actual nature of those societies may be characterized (which is also a harder question), none of them conforms to the definition of socialism that I want to use.

Socialism is not a political system, it is an economic one. However, in the sense that I use the term, socialism is compatible only with a democratic political system – that is, one in which choices about policy, and about the leaders who will administer its implementation, are made by the people themselves. No totalitarian or autocratic system, like Stalin's USSR or Mao's China, can be considered socialist. (By the same token, I might add, no capitalist system can be considered genuinely democratic!)

Socialism, as I envision it, is an economic system under which all natural resources, as well as all means of producing goods and commodities (above the scale of individual artisanship), and of organizing the delivery of services, would be owned and managed by a democratically-run government for the benefit of the society as a whole. The government, in turn, would take full responsibility for meeting everyone's fundamental needs – food, clothing, shelter, health care, education, transportation, a healthy ecosystem, access to cultural and recreational resources – at the highest level possible.

Rational planning, not competition for profit, would drive the allocation of resources, with the goal of meeting the needs of society as a whole. Maximum use of technology – intelligently designed and environmentally sustainable – would ensure that human drudgery could be continually reduced over time. Advances in productivity would be used to reduce the length of the work week and raise the standard of living for everyone, not to enrich a small elite.

### ORGANIAN'S FAVORITES



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### UPDATES

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[Brain-stimulating activity helps save memory](#)  
*posted by: CarolynKay*
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[The Language Police - real ones](#)  
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[Spies & Presidents Who Lie, Lie, Lie](#)  
*posted by: Dennis Loo*
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*posted by: Mick Arran*
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[Are You Smarter Than A Third-Grader?](#)  
*posted by: Tom Cordle*
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[perhaps the scariest blog I've ever written \(parts 2 & 3\)](#)  
*posted by: old new lefty*
- 
[Paul Craig Roberts: "Will the Real Traitors Please Stand Up?"](#)  
*posted by: markinapan*
- 
[What To Expect](#)

"Evcharisto, Stathi! (That is my bad American spelling of the Greek word.) I would..."  
March 15, 2012 12:38PM

"Very true, and very moving. Thanks for posting this. Happy Father's Day!"  
June 19, 2011 01:10PM

"Good point in your last comment, Rick."  
December 09, 2010 10:28PM

## ORGANIAN'S LINKS

### MY LINKS

[Defining the Issue](#)  
[What I Mean by "Socialism"](#)  
[Socialism & Human Behavior](#)  
[More on Socialism & Human Behavior](#)

### MY LINKS

[Humanist Workers for Revolutionary Socialism](#)

Under this system, everyone would enjoy an equally decent standard of living, and an equal opportunity to enjoy the richness of life. In exchange, people would understand that everyone who is able to do so must work, but education, technology, humanely and democratically operated workplaces, a shorter work week, and an emphasis on cooperation would combine to make work a more rewarding, less stressful experience, so that few people would be reluctant to make their appropriate contribution to society in this way.

Maximum consideration would be given to finding work that fits the individual's talents and preferences. To the extent that jobs involving drudgery, danger, and/or difficult working conditions remained necessary, they would be filled on a voluntary basis, using incentives such as extra time off and early retirement to recruit for them. Those with unusual talents, energies, or skills would be encouraged to use them to the fullest extent, for the benefit of society. Extraordinary contributions would be rewarded through public recognition, allocation of resources for additional projects, and the satisfaction inherent in the work itself, rather than through money or material privileges.

Parents of children below school age would be able to choose freely how much time they wanted to spend at home with their children, and how much they wanted to work, with the support of free, high-quality professional childcare. Those unable to work full-time, or at all, due to illness or physical or mental disability, would be treated with dignity and provided with all the necessities of life, including suitable opportunities for recreation and cultural enrichment. Behavior that victimizes other people or the society would be handled not through punitive measures such as incarceration, but by determining and addressing its underlying cause.

Education would be free at all levels, throughout a person's lifetime. Primary education would be structured so as to inculcate the young with critical thinking skills; intellectual curiosity and independence; a sense of responsibility to those around them and to society as a whole; and a preference for accomplishing mutual goals through cooperation over striving for individual glory through competition.

All objects of great cultural significance would be housed in museums open to all, rather than displayed privately in the homes of the wealthy. Goods whose scarcity is intrinsic and/or cannot be reduced (such as access to uncrowded wilderness, or tickets to a cultural performance) would be allocated fairly, such as by waiting list or lottery, rather than through money and social privilege.

There's more, but I think this covers the basics. Again, I stress that this post does not cover the questions of whether this is feasible, or how we can get there from here.

Thanks to anyone who has managed to read through this whole thing! I welcome your comments.

**AUTHOR TAGS:** [communism](#), [socialism](#), [politics](#)

**YOUR TAGS:**

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## Comments [Post a comment](#)

I think that your definition is the generally accepted one, at least for those who have studied socialism as an economic system.

I suspect that the "pure" version you describe is unattainable. The avarice of important players will rise to the fore. Greed isn't a monopoly of capitalism, you know.



[Wayne Gallant](#)



[When A Husband Dies.](#)  
*posted by: Kathy Knechtges*

NOVEMBER 22, 2008 09:20 PM

Utopia always seems nice, clean and simply attainable. What is always missing from these kinds of visions is the dark side of reality. For example, how will a socialist-like society deal with bureaucracy in such a state-run system? We Americans like to view Government in terms of elected representatives. We forget or overlook the fact that our over bloated bureaucratic system remains self-sustaining, blind to outsiders, and arrogantly permanent as compared to ephemerally elected leaders. I don't know of a single country that has successfully eliminated, replaced, or adequately streamlined its own bureaucratic system. How do you, or would you get rid of our largely dysfunctional bureaucratic system? And what would you replace it with?

How soon we forget how FIMA handled the Katrina aftermath! We all suffer as much from bureaucratic mismanagement as we do from ineffective elected leaders. Both seem to be missing from Utopia!

*Flammable*

NOVEMBER 23, 2008 07:52 AM

There is nothing wrong with a little socialism here and there. National healthcare? Good idea. Public utilities? Great idea. Public roads, without tolls? Even better. Mass transit, especially in the Southwest, very good. There is a lot to be said for socialism. And it works, it provides social goods that the market mechanism cannot and will not ever be able to, even if it is regulated properly.



*Sean Paul Kelley*

NOVEMBER 23, 2008 10:59 AM

If you ever use the term socialism in any other discussion please reference this page for clarification. Otherwise no one will have a clue. Many political movements use and/or have used the term in their titles, but none to my knowledge come close to meaning what you mean.



*ej david*

NOVEMBER 23, 2008 12:48 PM

Pardon the additional post, but I find no 'EDIT' button.

Various groups have actually attempted the type of system you describe. These include a variety autonomous Christian groups, perhaps the original Quakers are an example, but many others tend to include one or another version of the term 'communal' in descriptions of themselves. Your extensive definition will avoid otherwise inevitable confusion when you use the term.



*ej david*

NOVEMBER 23, 2008 12:57 PM

Thanks to all for your comments so far. Some of them segue nicely into the posts I am planning to write later about human nature (or rather, human behavior) and about the feasibility of what I describe.

The existence of some confusion about the meaning of the term is exemplified by the contrast between Wayne's view that my definition is pretty standard (which I think is true among those who have studied Marxist theory with any sympathy or at least open-mindedness), and ej david's view that it is so non-standard as to require that I reference it whenever I use the term. Actually, ej, that was exactly why I started my planned series of posts with this one, and I do intend to hyperlink back to it regularly. (Also - no worries about the multiple comments -you are neither the first OSer to lament the lack of an Edit Comment button, nor will you be the last, I'm sure. Maybe OS will fix that bug someday.)

More to follow. Looking forward to a continuing dialogue.



*Organian*

NOVEMBER 23, 2008 01:24 PM

I agree with Wayne that what you've described is the classic definition of socialism but it may possibly need to be either simplified or updated. I'll explain the former in a post this week but I can explain the latter by suggesting that the definition above is the commonly accepted depiction of Communism, while the commonly accepted definition of socialism has come to resemble what you call "European Democratic Socialism". Might there be some good reason to accept these definitions rather than go back to Square One?



*Mick Arran*

NOVEMBER 23, 2008 04:59 PM

Arrrgh.

Should read "classic definition" that may "possibly" need to be updated.

I should always read the damn thing before I publish when I'm in a hurry. Sorry. These fat old fingers always seem to hit many more letters than I personally intend.



*Mick Arran*

NOVEMBER 23, 2008 05:09 PM

For more on this subject, see my followup post entitled "[More on Socialism and Human Behavior](#)".

Mike, the traditional Marxist view is that communism grows out of socialism when the latter has been in place so long, and things are so settled, that the state can "wither away." My description posited the continuing existence of a state, at least temporarily, and therefore referenced an advanced state of socialism rather than actual communism. That's pretty technical, but it's why I used the term "socialism" and not "communism," despite the fact that the former term has been diluted in common parlance to include European social democracy (which is not socialism at all, but rather a kinder, gentler capitalism).



*Organian*

NOVEMBER 27, 2008 12:18 AM

charming dream. let's hear how you're gonna get there, working with dubya voters and auto ceos.



*al loomis*

NOVEMBER 28, 2008 12:29 AM

Al, I'm gratified that you find it charming. And - you may say I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one.

Seriously, I do intend to discuss how to get there from here - though I am far from pretending to have any, much less all, of the answers. But I do have a few ideas, which I will get to in due course. Stay tuned. Thanks for reading.



*Organian*

NOVEMBER 28, 2008 01:08 AM

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