

# Transhumanist Socialism

## Democracy, Pluralism and "Counter-Revolutionary Forces"

True socialism has pervasive democracy at its core - which means democracy not only in politics, but also in workplaces and educational institutions, for example. That is why even Cuba, despite its many good points, is not truly socialist, because of course it is run by a dictatorship. Still less so was the Soviet Union, or Maoist China, or any of the other undemocratic regimes (such as Saddam Hussein's brutal regime) that have called themselves "socialist" at one time or another.

However, a fully-democratic socialist society opens up the possibility of the people voting against socialism and for a reactionary regime. If this happens, the will of the majority must be honored, and those who still wanted socialism would have to either begin advocating again for a return to socialism, or secede as a separate socialist state if a certain region wanted to remain socialist, or move to a separate socialist state elsewhere, if any. The possibility of socialism leading to its own demise cannot be ruled out by dismissal or by fiat, but it can be thought highly unlikely given the way in which socialism democratizes wealth and opportunity. A full-blown commitment to democracy cannot have any exceptions where we arbitrarily decide that "we know better than the majority of the people and therefore we take precedence" - or rather, we can *believe* that we know better, but we cannot unilaterally impose this belief on the majority. That way lies tyranny and repression - and other less blunt anti-social political tendencies.

## The Long-Term Socioeconomic Effects of Advanced Molecular Nanotechnology

While it is difficult to predict the long-term effects of MNT (molecular nanotechnology) this early in the game, three plausible key considerations can still be identified at this early stage:

1. Just as today, any common general-purpose computer can in principle be used to create a destructive computer virus or worm, in the future, general-purpose nanotech assemblers will be capable in principle of creating highly destructive nanoweapons. The possibility of a mentally-disturbed individual using an assembler to create a weapon and killing large numbers of people will necessitate very high physical and information security requirements for general-purpose assemblers. They will not be, and should not be, freely available to members of the general public (for the same reasons that nuclear weapons should not be freely available). However, this should not prevent sufficiently-secured "preprogrammed" assemblers, which would only manufacture a finite range of "relatively safe" artifacts, from being made available to the general public and to organizations and businesses. The programming of these special-purpose devices will also have to be very highly regulated and secured, at some level, for the very same reasons.
2. Worldwide voluntary relinquishment of nanotechnology, at any level, is not a realistic possibility in our present capitalist-oriented world system. The military (and industrial) *competitive advantages* will simply be too great to ignore.
3. Just as today the large US music corporations (represented by the RIAA) perceive (perhaps correctly) Internet file-sharing as a threat to their business model, in the future all kinds of large suppliers of *physical*

*goods* (including perhaps food, drinks, drugs, fossil fuels, electronic devices, etc.) will see in MNT a threat to theirs.

MNT could both massively reduce energy *requirements* for the meeting of basic human needs, and massively increase decentralized and/or renewable energy *production*, by making extremely cheap solar panels available in large volumes.

Ironically, the established fossil fuel industries may be torn between supporting MNT to reduce their operating costs, and shooting themselves in the foot by supporting the development of a technology which will slash demand for their own products! Their best bet for survival might turn out to be giving in to progress and reinventing themselves and what they do - and thus moving away from fossil fuels as a source of revenue. This can only be good news in terms of reducing CO2 emissions, and emissions of other pollutants generated from burning fossil fuels.

On the more speculative end, MNT assemblers could even one day be used to mass-produce food and drink - not by growing plants or raising animals, but simply by assembling the end-product molecule by molecule, with a far more efficient "production process". In effect, it would be mass-replication of original food items, which would be specially selected for tastiness. This would have a number of fantastic potential benefits:

- Given that this type of nanotech food would be far cheaper than the old-fashioned, "slow-grow" stuff, and yet still taste just the same as the original specimen, demand for slow-grow food would decline. This would save untold numbers of animals from the barbaric cruelty of factory farming and modern production-line slaughterhouses, and it would make the moral arguments for a "cruelty-minimized lifestyle" (a spot presently occupied by veganism) even harder to cogently rebut. One could no longer even reply "But real meat tastes better than 'no-cruelty' meat" - since they could be made to taste just the same!
- By the same token, the environment (and thus human health) would benefit, due to a long-term reduction in meat-based agriculture which causes such havoc in terms of water pollution, deforestation and global warming (to name just three effects).
- Initial food specimens could be selected and engineered to minimise health risks, improving life expectancies by reducing the risks inherent in a meat-based diet.
- New food types could be created and devised to improve

*inherent* value to its possessor (if any), and its exchange value in terms of exchanging it for services (and land). There will be no longer much point in exploiting poor countries by forcing them to grow cash crops to pay off huge debts.

There will no longer be much point, in fact, in monopolizing the ownership of almost **any physical goods**. They'll be so cheap to produce that scarcity will become a non-issue! Capitalists could still try to hoard massive quantities of wealth to obtain more and better *services* (including custom-designed products), but massive quantities of wealth simply wouldn't be needed where mass-produced goods were concerned.

The programming of *highly-general* nanotech assemblers would still have to be tightly controlled to prevent terrorism and mass murder, but this in itself does not necessitate or even motivate the retention of the present-day quasi-capitalist system. It does, however, probably necessitate the retention of some form of State - but a truly democratic State that serves the people would not be a bad thing.

## MNT as a Facilitator of the Socialist Revolution

There will be a Nanotechnology Revolution matching or exceeding the scale and impact of the Industrial Revolution. But MNT could also bring the world tantalizingly closer to a political revolution - a socialist revolution. This is because, as mentioned above, MNT offers the possibility of ultra-cheap, convenient, and *decentralized* production and replication of many types of goods. Once we have this, we won't need the corporate multinationals any more. We won't need to be wage-slaves. And with large corporations fought back and withering away, the stage will be set for the fight to take back democracy and return it to the people.

Intellectual property would still be an obstacle to decentralization and democratization, and would become an increasingly important weapon in the multinational's arsenal. But in the nanotech future - even more so than now in the time of Napster and the like - the public should start to see the speciousness of intellectual property:

- There should be no "intellectual property" (whether copyrights, patents or trademarks) taken out on "blueprints" of living things - whether we are talking about DNA or about digital representations of the physical structure of a thing for the purposes of replicating it via nanotechnology.
- "Intellectual property" and other anti-competitive laws should not be used - as it has already been used with "anti-HIV" drugs - to deny basic needs - food, healthcare, shelter etc. - to people in need. In particular, neither IP nor new anti-competitive measures should be used to *deny non-profits* the opportunity to produce "open source blueprints" for MNT assemblers, which is what otherwise would happen.

Moreover, nanotechnology offers us an even more mind-blowing and revolutionary vision. If a large number of manufactured goods become almost "too cheap to charge for", two things will happen (at least in a quasi-capitalist world such as ours). (1) Massive economic dislocation. (2) To a quite fine level of approximation, only services and real estate - and a few physical exceptions like perhaps uranium - will end up having any "inherent cost" (that is, with the costs of "intellectual property royalties" and other needless corporate baggage stripped out).

(2) implies that wealth will become valuable *only* in virtue of its

human health by taking a "prevention comes first, cure second" approach.

- Finally - and in one sense most significantly for the development of socialism - MNT-based, decentralised production of basic human needs such as food and drink holds out the potential for **the abolition of wage-slavery**, and the freeing of the people from the dual tyranny of multinational corporations and their client states! Clearly, the multinationals will bitterly oppose this outcome - indeed the foregoing is a considerable understatement - but their hands will be tied to some extent by the fact that MNT will be so essential to remaining competitive by cutting production costs.

On the labor side of the equation, MNT could also lead to an enormous loss of jobs worldwide. However, as with all unemployment, this is not a necessary eventuality, but rather a product of a brutal system which organises production around profit rather than human need.

(Note, however, that these predictions are based on the assumption that MNT lives up to the promises of its most optimistic scientific proponents, such as [K. Eric Drexler](#).)

## Wage-Slavery and the Socialist Alternative

The problem of work, and of wage-slavery in particular, must be seen as an absolutely central challenge of our time, both because of the inherent wickedness of wage-slavery and because of the evil capitalism system it props up. Millions of people around the world today work for a living, not at a job (or jobs) which they love and enjoy and gives them value in life, but in a job (or jobs) which bores them or stresses them out or eats them up and spits them out - simply because they have to - or feel they have to. A few people are lucky enough to have high job satisfaction, but many are not. More than this, though: contemporary capitalism condemns millions of people - who, even though they may be not *enormously* discontented with their jobs, are prevented from exploring their full potential as a human being - to a life lacking in freedom, opportunity, and social inclusion.

Another world is possible. Another world is necessary!

A world in which work is shared between one person and another, and between person and machine, such that no person is stuck with doing all unpleasant work, all the time. That which *no-one* wants to do should be automated, as far as it is feasible and safe to do so. That work which remains which is unpleasant, or unfulfilling, or unregarded, should be given to those who honestly and freely volunteer to do it full-time, and/or shared out between people as far as is sensible, in order that everyone may have time to fairly participate in work/leisure which is pleasant, fulfilling, or well-regarded.

In a socialist society such as this, the society would ensure that no person's basic material needs went unmet - food, drink, housing, heating would be provided for free where necessary. Rates of pay would be collectively set, according to, primarily, the approximate *social value* of the work, and secondarily, the approximate amount of *effort* put in. (This would be hard to gauge in some cases, but for example, present-day schoolteachers would almost all be given a high rate of pay due to both factors).

Corporations would have their material assets *un-confiscated* - i.e. returned to public ownership. There would be legal caps on both personal wealth and income to prevent dangerous inequalities of wealth (and therefore power) re-emerging. It would be illegal to hoard means of production to the detriment of society, or to hoard basic needs like food when others were in dire need of it.

This balance between pay differentials to provide incentives (in some sectors, such as maybe teaching, pay differentials would not usually be used *between* the same type of workers, but only between them and other types of workers) and democratic controls on wealth and power, satisfies the core values of socialism (loosely-defined) without leading to stagnation. Both socialists and their opponents must recognise that both extrinsic rewards (e.g. money) and intrinsic rewards (e.g. job satisfaction) have their place in motivating people, and neither one should be ignored to the detriment of the other.