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Paper title: “Socialism in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century”

Abstract: In “Socialism: Utopian and Scientific”, Marx and Engels maintained that, “to make a science of socialism, it had first to be placed upon a real basis”. Yet Marx was never crisply clear, in his published work, on precisely what he meant with the statement, placing socialism on a “real basis”. Nor did he elaborate clearly upon what the claim to capital-S science his understanding of socialism embodied? Reading into what Marx did write, two different conceptions of what Marx possibly meant emerge. The first is what has animated all really existing socialist experiments to date and still holds in thrall many of Marx’s followers. Its operating statement is found in the famous *Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. Here Marx declares: “At a certain stage of development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production...From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an era of social revolution...” This statement lent an aura of historical inevitability to the socialist project. Notwithstanding the unraveling of earlier socialist experiments, new ingenious renderings of this view have been put forward by scholars working in diverse traditions. The second draws upon closing thoughts of Marx’s *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. Marx states the following: “Bourgeois society is the most advanced and complex historical organization of production. The categories which express its relations, and an understanding of its structure, therefore, provide an insight into the structure and the relations of production of all formerly existing social formations...The anatomy of man is a key to the anatomy of the ape.” Here Marx advances the ontological proposition that *economic life of human societies cannot be studied directly*. Rather, because economic life first appears as a separate “sphere” in the capitalist era, it is through the economic theorizing of capital that economic life in precapitalist societies and possibilities for organizing economic life in postcapitalist societies may be explored. This second view of Marx as a foundation for socialism has been serially overlooked within the profession of Marxist studies. Taking up this second view of socialism in Marx’s writings this presentation argues that just as natural and biospheric health and richness is ensured by diversity, so the richness of human material existence and achieving the socialist goal of human flourishing is fostered by varieties of human economic practices which draw to the fore a variety of human attributes and potentialities. Karl Marx, Karl Polanyi and David Graeber are drawn upon to discuss some of the workable material choices for an eco-sustainable future post-capitalist society.