Throughout this century, it has been commonplace for Western shapers of public opinion to dismiss anyone who puts forward a vision of a desirable future society as merely "utopian," and to get on with more "realistic" pursuits. In the judgment of one social analyst, this tendency has become so pronounced that "... for the first time in the three thousand years of Western civilization, there has been a massive loss of capacity or even will, for renewal of images of the future... constructive images... generally accepted idealistic images." Of course, it should also be recognized that one person's "realism" has often been another's "utopia" and that anti-utopian attacks also often imply a rival moral view of what general principles should determine the life and structure of society.

The major contending intellectual traditions of our epoch may be broadly distinguished as bourgeois and socialist. Socialists have been explicitly committed to an egalitarian restructuring of society, identifying foremost with those who are materially disadvantaged and exploited, while the more predominant bourgeois intellectuals have characteristically viewed the continuation of most hegemonic inequalities as inherently unavoidable and presumed to be speaking to and for universalistic interests. But twentieth century socialists have generally been at least equally scornful of "utopians" as bourgeois thinkers have been. Despite these concerted attacks, some visionary thinkers have continued, within both bourgeois and socialist traditions, to put forward images of preferred futures.

Three essential ingredients can be distinguished in any effort either to maintain or restructure the current social reality: understanding of the existing society, a vision of the future, and a strategy for getting
there. However elaborate it is, an image of the future that is not based on a valid interpretation of contemporary social forces and continually linked with strategic action is merely a fantasy. Conversely, when morally-based envisioning is truncated or postponed, as it typically has been within twentieth century bourgeois and socialist traditions, approaches to the future are likely to consist of ameliorative or apocalyptic extrapolations from historical conditions and purely expedient political tactics. The social analyses and/or strategies of most of the idealistic visionaries to be considered here have been woefully inadequate, but their images of preferred futures do deserve serious consideration in humane efforts to shape the future.

The system of dominant beliefs that emerged with the Industrial Revolution and the Renaissance is clearly distinguishable from the world view of the Middle Ages by its emphasis on individualism, nationalism, mastery over nature, rationalism, materialism, and secular progress. The twentieth century has seen substantial, if segmented, intellectual questioning of each of these precepts as articles of faith and increasing public uncertainty about many of them. Massive collectivist restructuring has also occurred in some societies. We are, perhaps, living in a period of major ideological transition. But while the several varieties of socialists have been a most visible contending force against established structural inequalities, even socialists with a preferred future image have continued to overlap significantly in their modes of thought with those bourgeois intellectuals most deliberately concerned with legitimating current social relations. Of course, this is merely to observe that historical ideological forms can no more be abruptly overturned than material structures can. The images of preferred futures drawn by many visionaries do, however, suggest quite comprehensive transformations of existing societies.

Our purpose in this exploratory paper is to provide a brief and highly selective summary of twentieth century attempts to construct images of desirable futures, and to offer general and largely assertive assessments of the usefulness of such images for bourgeois and socialist purposes. In this space, we can only cite from among the Western bourgeois and socialist preferred visions and make reference to Canadian examples where available. It should be noted that the social form of education is often not singled out for detailed treatment in these preferred futures. But its character is strongly implied in the general delineation of desired social forms and, almost invariably, education is appealed to as the critical strategic process for realizing the preferred future.
bourgeois visions

A tenacious adherence to the value of individual liberty *per se* remains the constant distinguishing tenet of contemporary bourgeois ideology. However, the *laisser-faire*, individual initiative conception promulgated by Mill and others during the nineteenth century has faded until reversion to a "possessive individualism" more appropriate to the corporate capitalist political economy. A generalized belief in the importance and inevitability of technological rationalization has come to be just as central as individual liberty in the dominant contemporary bourgeois world view. The prevailing bourgeois approach to the future is best exemplified by efforts at "value-free" social forecasting. Using a variety of "objective" techniques, such studies end up making ameliorative extrapolations of existing social conditions. But, virtually all such works, even those scientific extrapolations that have recently perceived nature's limits to material progress, may be seen as ambiguous attempts to reconcile technological rationality with a modicum of individual consumer rights. The elaborate forecasts of "post-industrial" society by Daniel Bell and Herman Kahn are most representative of this dominant approach to the future, while Marshall McLuhan's probes and postulations on the extension of technocratic media to the "global village" are the most prominent Canadian example. The enduring image of the future left by all such bourgeois writings is one of irreversible technocratic trends, remote from whatever small privileges ordinary people could retain.

When we examine the efforts of other bourgeois intellectuals to set out morally-explicit images of preferred futures, we find no such underlying consensus. In this respect, we can agree with Warren Wagar's judgment that the central spiritual fact of the last hundred years of Western civilization has been an ever-accelerating disintegration. "Everything fragments. A steadily rising number of educated people are engaged in producing a steadily rising number of competing and essentially private systems of belief or escape from belief." Any attempt to categorize this cacophony of proposals must be incomplete. Relying largely on Michael Marien's bibliographic surveys of the general English language literature and Hugh Stevenson's similar efforts in Canada, we will simply outline some of the most prominent modes of bourgeois thinking about preferred futures. These may be identified respectively as *cosmic evolutionist, reconstructed individualist, ecological limits, decentralist, world order models and piecemeal change* perspectives.

*Cosmic evolutionism* is the highly abstracted, optimistic view that humanity is generally being transformed to a more desirable stage,
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travelling irrepressibly through any number of idealized levels of spiritual existence and consciousness. Teilhard de Chardin’s writings on the development of an Ultra-Humanity, with its thinking sphere (i.e. “noosphere”) becoming increasingly unified, probably offer the most elaborate schema of this type.\(^1\)

**Reconstructed individualism** begins with a much less lofty focus on human needs and interests and tries to sketch out new social forms that could fulfill such individual needs better than the present society. Pitirim Sorokin’s *The Reconstruction of Humanity* is a comprehensive blueprint of this type, while B. F. Skinner’s advocacy of a technology of behavior that can shape environment for a better society provides a more controversial example.\(^2\)

The recent concern with **ecological limits to growth** has given rise to essentially the reverse approach. That is, population growth, resource scarcities, rampant technology and pollution threats may be perceived as requiring substantial changes in individual interests and habits, as well as some governmental reform. The British *Blueprint for Survival* and Ferkiss’ discussion of “ecological humanism” spell out their various desired changes in individual and social ethos most clearly.\(^3\)

**Decentralist thinkers** represent a more long-standing reaction against the general dehumanizing effects of big business and big government. In direct contrast to technological extrapolationists such as Kahn, they have advocated small-scale communities and technologies, modest comfort rather than affluence, and a do-it-yourself philosophy. Ralph Barsodi has proposed the most elaborate decentralist future, and Schumacher and Illich are among the most imaginative recent proponents.\(^4\)

The desire for peace is even more long-standing and has become of heightened concern in a world of big powers and resource scarcities. The *World Order Models Project* represents the most ambitious bourgeois-led effort yet to envision preferred social futures on a global scale. In the most exceptional of these studies, Richard Falk\(^5\) has developed a model of preferred global institutions based specifically on the values of peace, social and economic well-being, fundamental human rights, and protection of environmental quality. He has done this in the context of a detailed analysis of historical trends and patterns in world society and has tried to outline a transition strategy.

Distinct from and more numerous than all of the above currents of morally-explicit bourgeois thought that at least suggest some fun-
damental restructuring of established social relations, *piecemeal change thinkers* manage to propose desirable futures without questioning any of the dominant social structures. Such thinkers essentially differ from technological extrapolators only in their lack of pretense to scientific neutrality. Perhaps the most recent preferred vision of piecemeal change is the "humanistic capitalism" image, promulgated by John D. Rockefeller and others, which argues that business and social policy should be more closely integrated, with the growth and consumption ethic being balanced by ecological and self-realization ethics. In substance it differs little from *Industry and Humanity*, published by McKenzie King in 1918 while he was working for the Rockefellers before becoming Canada's Prime Minister.

The extent of ideological dependence on the United States is generally overwhelming in Canadian bourgeois policy literature. As Stevenson's bibliography shows, this writing is predominantly within the piecemeal change mode. It has characteristically been reflective of American themes, but with a now increasing degree of reactionary nationalist sentiment. Very little of this work has been of a positive visionary nature. The most notable recent exception is probably Herschel Hardin's *A Nation Unaware*, which sees in the Canadian economic foundations of public enterprise and interregional distribution, the distinct roots of a new, ideologically vigorous, world culture.

Overall, twentieth century bourgeois visions of preferred futures appear to serve the hegemonic interests of dominant groups in Western capitalist societies just as well as do the much more extensive "objective" efforts of most bourgeois intellectuals to document existing social relations as the enduring reality. Even in the most radical moral visions, the critiques of current conditions and the proposals put forward generally take for granted or ignore questions of wealth and power inequalities. Even fervent decentralists have been content to make populist appeals, which at best have inspired some isolated new community experiments. Very rarely is the preferred image linked to a detailed analysis of society or strategic considerations. Even where this is the case, as in the most sophisticated world order models, there is no theoretical effort to discern the relations among social forces underlying observable trends, or to connect suggested strategies with identifiable social groups. The fundamental understanding, visions, and strategies of active bourgeois social forces remain largely unaffected by these disengaged visionaries. At the essence of each one of these bourgeois efforts at developing an
image of the desired future is a definite one-sidedness, that is, a mode of analysis which fails to grasp the concrete totality. What lies at the basis of contemporary bourgeois thought is an inability to go beyond the appearances of the form of corporate capitalism to the reality of the ensemble of social relations. No adequate theory of a desired future is possible until the totality of corporate capitalist social relations is grasped and strategic agents based on such analysis are identified.

**socialist visions**

The early socialists, without exception, were “utopian.” Thinkers such as Fournier, Weitling, Saint-Simon, Owen and Cobbett were all moved by their revolutionary distaste for the capitalist disorder to attempt to develop precise pictures of how the world ought to be. While recognizing a debt to these founders of socialism, Marx and Engels, in the light of their own scientific socialism, vigorously dismissed utopian socialists’ visions as pure fantasies.

Marx and Engels were generally opposed, not only to delineating detailed and abstract notions of the future, but also to developing even the broadest systematic theory of the dynamics of socialism. Latent within their writings, especially the early writings, there is an image of a world-scale future society which would be non-alienating, based on production for need, and where full social and political democracy would flourish. There are actual fragments of discussions of the future society in the *Critique of the Gotha Program* (which Lenin’s *State and Revolution* does little more than echo) and in Engels’ *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*. The official inheritors of Marx and Engels, in the form of Kautsky and the Second International, and Stalin and the Third International, dismissed all discussion of the future as reactionary, utopian and a general heresy.

The lack of a theory of a desirable socialist society has been a serious shortcoming of Marxist praxis. To take the example of the Russian Revolution, the Bolsheviks simply did not have a theory of what was to be done after the Kerensky government had been overthrown. It would appear that the Bolsheviks attempted to find theoretical guidelines in a haphazard fashion in various footnotes of Marx and Engels, without ever aiming to develop a theory based on the specificity of their situation and the inherent possibilities contained within that period. The theoretical confusion and fierce debates on
exactly what was developing and should be developing in the im-
mediate years after the revolution is a reflection of the lack of
clear goals and a general theory of socialist society. Debate and con-
fusion were ended once the monolithic state under Stalin was erected
and a new theory was imposed. Those who dared to question were
eliminated.44

With the bureaucratization and isolation of the Soviet State and
the failure of other proletarian revolutions in Europe, major thinkers
of Western Marxism became increasingly secluded in universities
and/or bureaucratized Russian Communist parties. Thus they came
much more into contact with idealist and official systems of thought
than with working-class practice.45 Just like the major bourgeois spokes-
men, these professional Marxist philosophers came to rely heavily on
formalistic scientific methods while tending to diminish generic
sensuous elements of social life. Under these conditions, they gen-
erally lapsed into pessimism about the future. As Perry Anderson
observes, "... between 1920 and 1960, Marxism slowly changed
colors in the West. The confidence and optimism of the founders
of historical materialism, and of their successors, progressively dis-
appeared. Virtually every one of the significant new themes in the
intellectual muster of this epoch reveals the same diminution of
hope and loss of certainty."46 The most substantial exception at
a philosophical level has been the work of Ernst Bloch.47 He has
attempted to re-evaluate utopian views and hopes of humanity from
within a Marxist perspective. He argues, for instance, that:

... utopian possibilities are established in the concreteness and
openness of the material of history; indeed of the material of nature
itself.
This is the objective-real possibility which surrounds existing actuality
with tremendous latency, and affords the potency of human hope
its link with the potentiality within the world. Concrete utopia is
bound up with dialectical materialism, and prevents it from defaulting
— prevents it from discarding its visions of a goal ahead....48

But Bloch's work has been virtually ignored.49

On a more practical level, therefore, it is not surprising that most
of the concrete socialist visions of preferred futures in this century
have been generated by non-orthodox socialists, mainly by people
engaged in either anarchist, syndicalist or religious socialist move-
ments. Following in the tradition of Proudhon,50 a number of twentieth
century anarchists have tried to animate their preferred futures by
publishing fairly concrete sketches. Kropotkin's turn of the century
outline of non-hierarchical organization in Fields, Factories and
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Workshops remains the most detailed vision. Contemporary anarchists such as Paul Goodman, Murray Bookchin and Colin Ward have offered more partial pictures of decentralized social forms in response to current problems of alienation and technological change. The Paris Commune, the Spanish collectives, and “May 68” may all be seen in part as testaments to the appeal of the anarchist mode of thought.

Starting with the Christian Socialists of the nineteenth century, there have been attempts by religious intellectuals to respond to the social problems of unregulated capitalism by combining the social gospel with socialist politics. Visions suggesting spiritual regeneration in co-operative communes appeared quite frequently in the aftermath of World War I, while in the 1970’s there are still prominent religious leaders engaged in reformulating and struggling for the same moral vision. Religious socialist visions have inspired some of the most enduring confederated communes, such as the Israeli kibbutzim movement. There have also been recent attempts, particularly in France, to create a Christian Marxist vision of the future.

Canadian socialist thought has always depended heavily on British and American influences, and in no way has it surpassed their visionary accomplishments. The most elaborate Canadian socialist visions were largely inspired by the social gospel movement in the 1920’s. But the new cooperative commonwealths proposed by Salem Bland and Edward Partridge were soon forgotten. The founding of the C.C.F. in the early 1930’s provided a major vehicle for the development of socialist thought, but the polyglot composition including religious socialist, trade unionist and agrarian protest tendencies, as well as the British Fabian-inspired intellectuals of the League for Social Reconstruction, led to the dominance of pragmatic politics and the muting of visionary inclinations. The small Canadian Communist parties have typically adhered to external proscriptions on preferred futures thinking, and the anarchist tradition has been quite negligible in Canada. However, confrontation with anarchist formulations has recently begun to stimulate some possibility of original thinking about desirable political futures among mainstream English Canadian socialists. In Quebec, Jacques Grand’Maison’s prolific writings on alternative social forms are the prominent example of visionary socialist thought. Also, although hardly “gospel socialism,” René Lévesque’s outlines of the institutional features of a separate Quebec must also be mentioned here. The recent electoral success of the Parti Québécois is probably provoking more serious reflection at this moment about desirable alternative futures.
use to the workers. Given the nature of the State, the two possibilities for social revolutions, according to Cole, were either some industrial action like a general strike where the state crumbled, or civil war. Although difficulties existed with either alternative, Cole was extremely skeptical about the possibility of armed civil war, as the British workers were unarmed and the army was stable.46

Central to the transition from capitalism to guild socialism was the process of education. Education was used in two senses. One was the informal sense where workers learned from their own concrete practice. For example, Cole and Mellor suggested that:

Step by step they will gain a foothold in control, and their experience will serve as an education alike to the leaders and to the rank and file, till at length they find that they are quite able to dispense with the capitalist, and to carry on production themselves for the common benefit.47

The second sense was that of a formal education in workers’ institutions like trade unions or the Workers’ Education Association and the Central Labour College. In the struggle for socialism, “Even if education is not everything, it is at least a very great deal.”48

What, then, was the guild socialist preferred image of the future? For nearly all the movement’s theorists, “guild” implied voluntary organization and democratic management. The guild notion of socialism was a positive synthesis of the two dominant trends of the workers’ movement at the time, namely syndicalism and the state socialist reformism of the Fabian socialists and Labour Party. It was argued that although the syndicalists were fundamentally correct in believing that there should be self-government in industry, their concern for producers was one-sided as there was more in society than producers and production.49 Whereas the Labour Party was concerned only with distribution of income and advocated nationalization as a universal panacea, the guild socialists perceived such state socialism as no more than state capitalism because nationalization per se produces no fundamental change in capitalism.50

In summary, the guild socialists would have a series of national industrial guilds which would be productive and which would control democratically all branches of manufacturing and resource extraction. All workers in an industry would be in a guild and their trades or specialties might be separately organized within this guild. As well, there would be a civic guild that would organize all state employees. National Guilds would emerge from the transformation of industrial unions in the new society. All the guilds would be united in a central
than has occurred since Confederation. But this is only to say, to date, Canadian socialist thought has been just as devoid of intelligible, indigenously developed images of preferred futures as Canadian bourgeois thought has been.

The only movement in this century that has systematically attempted to develop a new theory and model of the desired socialist future in conjunction with its specific potential actuality has been *guild socialism*. We will therefore outline and discuss it in some detail. Guild socialism was a British middle class intellectual movement which existed in a coherent shape from approximately 1912 to 1921. The guild socialist critique of capitalism was that its democracy was a mere sham based on an assumption that people were politically free and had the right to vote. This democracy amounted to one minute each election, the time it took to cast a ballot, so that in a lifetime a person would have achieved an hour of democracy at best. There was no freedom and no equality as long as the fundamentally irrational wage system existed. According to guild theorists, the wage system was based on the autocracy of capitalism and was the basic problem with the capitalist order. Due to this wage system, a class struggle existed which could only end when the autocracy of capital was replaced by the self-government of workers. In short, wage slavery perverted the latent potentiality of humanity.

The transition to a new society based on the ideas embraced by guild socialism was already underway. The guild theorists argued that in Britain workers were beginning to fight for control of the factories; new forms of rank and file organization to fight for union democracy and for a militant political platform were emerging. Central to the entire guild movement was the view that unions had to be transformed into a small number of industrial unions that were organized on an industry-wide basis. As G.D.H. Cole, the leading spokesman, argued:

> If industry is to be nationalized, only strong trade unions can prevent bureaucracy...; if industry is to be syndicalized, only strong trade unions will be capable of running it. On either showing, trade unionism should be the first concern of labour.

Existing in a period of international revolution and upsurge in worker militancy, the guildsmen learned a great deal from the experiences of socialists elsewhere. They became part of the movement that rejected reform for revolution as the only possible road to socialism. Cole was very clear, writing in 1920, that the State was a class institution, a bureaucratic complex created for the master class and of no
body; the guilds on a local basis would control production, and the national guild would serve the role of settling general problems and dealing with national issues in an industry. The Congress of Guilds would co-ordinate production and mediate differences that might emerge between guilds.

The consumers would be represented via their own organization, and the consumer and producer would be organized on a local basis into communes. At the local level, coordination of local problems of production and local disputes would be settled in negotiation between local guild and consumer representatives. On a national level the consumer and guild organizations would also negotiate and settle disputes. The major bodies would be made up half by producers and half by consumers. Cole felt that voting and representation should be based on function so citizens would often get more than one or two votes on the basis of their function as an individual or group, irrespective of the size of the group.

The above description only hints at the great detail of the guild socialist image of future society. The guild socialists themselves were not consistent about whether this future society was considered a utopia or not, although at one point it was referred to as a “scientific utopia.” Certainly it was not an image developed out of general theoretical concerns for the broad dynamics of a future socialist society, but a more or less precise and schematically detailed model for the future, overly concerned with form. But it was also qualitatively different from most other twentieth century thinking about preferred futures in the sense that it attempted to base itself on a real medium that, at that period, appeared to offer the potentiality for the guild socialist society, namely a militant working class that was moving in the direction of control of the factories. To realize its preferred future it developed a theory of industrial unions that were to be transformed into guilds.

In the final analysis, it remained a middle class movement throughout its existence. It was limited to a very specific period and all of its members and major theorists abandoned it within a short time. It was a reflection, nonetheless, of an idealism that gripped both the intellectual and the worker. Its failure lay in its obsession with the form of the new society and in not developing a general theory which would have allowed it to exist beyond this limited period of revolutionary unrest from 1912 to 1921. Guild socialism did, however, provide a real theoretical contribution in its concern for industrial democracy and general social organization that did go beyond reformism and syndicalism. In the broadest sense, the guild theorists stood for
self-government based on decentralization where both producers and consumers would be organized. The challenge remains to develop a broad libertarian theory of the dynamics of the new social formation that takes into account the guild socialist movement but goes beyond its specific writing and its specific period.

Images of preferred futures in twentieth century Western socialist thought have remained even rarer than in bourgeois thought. When they have appeared it has been not as the formulation of a fluid theory of a desired socialist society, but usually as static schema unrelated in any dynamic way with the development of historical understanding or strategic considerations. The international capitalist crisis of the current decade represents a new period of great “potentiality within the world,” to use Bloch’s term. There have recently been major advances in theoretical understanding of the historical dynamics of the economic and political bases of modern capitalism. There is also a growing theoretical and strategic understanding of the nature of ideological hegemony, as indicated by the rediscovery of Gramsci’s work. There is even some very recent evidence of wider socialist interest in formulating visions of the future than at any time in this century. But, for the moment, Western socialist visions of preferred futures remain less developed than those of the guild socialists and quite unconnected with the gains in historical understanding and strategic capacity. This is at once the failure and the promise of contemporary Western socialist thought.

footnotes

3. The bourgeois-socialist distinction is a continuum rather than a dichotomy, and any definite dividing line between modes of thought viewed in these terms must be somewhat arbitrary.
4. It is true that utopian fiction writing has now almost disappeared. See W. H. G. Armytage, Yesterday's Tomorrows: A Historical Survey of Future Societies, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968, for a review and, J. Shklar, “The Political Theory of Utopia: From Melancholy to Nostalgia” in F. Manuel (ed.), Utopias and Utopian Thought, Boston: Beacon, 1967, pp. 101-115, for an explanation for the demise of classical utopian writing. Dystopian fiction literature has proliferated, including several works which can serve as powerful negative visions for approach-
ing the future. See L. Sargent, "Utopia and Dystopia in Contemporary Science Fiction," The Futurist, Vol. VI, No. 3 (1972), pp. 93-98. Our interest is rather in visions that are put forward as realizable preferences.


34. See Buber, pp. 139-149.
41. With regard to *historical* significance we must concur with Hobsbawm that “... the number of articles, books and authors which a political tendency produces is notoriously a poor measure of its practical importance, except of course among intellectuals. Guild socialism, an articulate and much described creed, deserves at best a footnote in the actual history of the British labour movement.” See E. Hobsbawm, *Revolutionaries*, New York: Pantheon, 1973, p. 130.
46. ———, *Guild Socialism Re-Stated*, pp. 174-188.

48.  

49.  


51.  

52.  

53.  

54. For the details involved see Margaret Cole, "Guild Socialism: The Stor­rington Document."

