

Futures of Socioeconomic Democracy

Robley E. George*

This paper sketches some possible futures of Socioeconomic Democracy. It outlines the many very different, yet all fundamentally democratic, societal futures evolvable within a Socioeconomic Democracy (SeD) framework. A review of some of the essential theoretical and practical aspects of democratic socioeconomic systems is first presented. A truncated list of the many desirable ramifications of Socioeconomic Democracy is followed by some observations about the realizability/implementation of SeD. Many different kinds of democratic societies can evolve with Socioeconomic Democracy. Practical political approximations to the ideal theoretical model further widen the range of possible democratic socioeconomic systems basically approaching the theoretical model.

Keywords: economic democracy, futures of politics, political design

* Robley E. George, Center for the Study of Democratic Societies, Box 475 Nanhattan Beach, CA 90267-0475, USA. Email: Georgecsds@aol.com; website: www.centersds.com

Introduction

Knowledge of the past facilitates realization of the future. Noting the unnecessary-to-repeat present global chaos, crises, transitions and transformation, the megatrends of macrohistorical change and development should prove helpful in providing hints as to what might be expected under what conditions in the foreseeable and influenceable future.

Two ever-recurring themes, which have found expression both in words and actions in every millennium of mankind, are the questions about the distribution of wealth and the perennial thrust toward more and more meaningful democracy - all couched, of course, in the terminology of the time.

In the religious arena, all major faiths had at their core inspiration (whether or not now faithful to it) a condemnation of an imbalance in the distribution of wealth. From Muhammad's *Zakat* (one of the five Pillars of Islam), which is basically a tax on wealth to nourish and develop all society, to Jesus' familiar remarks regarding the poor, the rich, entrance to Heaven, a camel and the eye of a sewing instrument, to the Jewish command and purpose of the Jubilee Year to the social philosophy of all the Great Religions, there were and are to be some form of limitation or bound on disparity in wealth ownership, and further the wealthy have an obligation and responsibility to those not so fortunate. This is universal, across all religions, and in all cases this social philosophy was offered to humanity millennia before there were any millionaires, let alone billionaires.

In the political realm (and assuming there actually exist at least *some* interesting nonoverlapping areas logically differentiating "religion" and "politics," since they have so much in common), the thread of thought can be traced at least from the early Greeks to the present. For example, Thales of Miletus, first of the "Seven Sages," long ago summed it up nicely: "If there is neither excessive wealth nor immoderate poverty in a nation, then justice may be said to prevail." Then Plato: "When they [goods] are in excess, they produce enmities; and feuds both in States and privately, while if they are deficient they produce, as a rule, serfdom." And then Aristotle: "No one should have more than five times the wealth of the poorest person." (Cited in Richard Gilbert 1991.)

Consider the Enlightenment and its resulting politicosocioeconomic revolutions, when again talented tongues, pens and minds conspired to better understand, design and realize more satisfying structures and systems to serve human society. Here we can only briefly note some of the

familiar sentiments of two particularly impressive revolutionaries. First, in a letter to Madison, Thomas Jefferson ([1785] 1984) wrote: "I am conscious that an equal division of property is impractical, but the consequences of...enormous inequality producing so much misery to the bulk of mankind, legislators cannot invent too many devices for subdividing property, only taking care to let their subdivisions go hand in hand with the natural affections of the human mind.... Another means of silently lessening the inequality of property is to exempt taxation below a certain point and to tax the higher portions of property in geometrical progression as they rise."

Then, in *Rights of Man*, Thomas Paine ([1791] 1961) observed: "Admitting that any annual sum, say, for instance, one thousand pounds, is necessary or sufficient for the support of a family, consequently the second thousand is of the nature of a luxury, the third still more so, and by proceeding on, we shall at last arrive at a sum that may not improperly be called a prohibitable luxury. It would be impolitic to set bounds to property acquired by industry, and therefore it is right to place the prohibition beyond the probable acquisition to which industry can extend; but there ought to be a limit to property or the accumulation of it by bequest."

The clamoring for social justice and against the growing and increasingly harmful maldistribution of wealth continues to this day, with crescendo. In partial response, there is a plethora of proposed solutions to the planet's many pressing problems, with each solution possessing its own area of applicability, tentative probability of success and set of side-effects, shortcomings and oversights. The proposed solutions range from timid incrementalism to sweeping and fundamental change. The time frame for realization ranges from near instantaneous to, it would appear in some cases, near infinite.

Some observers suggest that the technological imperative, uncontrollably and rapidly developing the e-future, may of itself make it possible and even inevitable that the mighty juggernaut of global capitalism will eventually redirect itself toward a far more effective and beneficial service to humanity - this, the result of capitalistic self-interest in an era of instantaneous information and communication. Others might counter that, however desirable the theory outcome would be, there is an aspect to it which reminds one of the hope that dynamite might eliminate war.

Whether the present and coming revolutions are to be velvet or violent, voluntary or involuntary, thoughtful or stupid, problem-solving or problem-producing, zero-sum or nonzero-sum, remains to be seen - or more

accurately, determined. Everything considered, it is here assumed legitimate to consciously, explicitly, overtly and rationally design improved economic systems. Unabashedly employing the engineering metaphor, it is difficult to improve upon Keith Roberts' (1983) definition of the subject and its philosophy in his pioneering *Automation, Unemployment and the Distribution of Income*. "Economic engineering is the discipline that is concerned with the design of model economic systems to meet specified requirements, and with the prediction and evaluation of the performance of such systems." As Roberts elaborates, "In addition to the existing disciplines of pure and applied economic science one should therefore recognize the new discipline of economic engineering, the task of this new discipline being to design and analyze, in detail, alternative model economies to meet appropriate specifications, and to put them forward as options for public discussion and political decision."

In an acknowledgement of the actual situation, some have referred to this process and discipline as Socioeconomic Engineering, with acronym SEE. It is in this spirit that the ideas and different possible futures of Socioeconomic Democracy will now be described.

Democratic Socioeconomic Systems

Thus within and without the "Science of Economics," two extremely important concerns are the distributions of wealth and income in any society - and among different societies. The Socioeconomic Democracy model deals directly with the bounds or extreme limits of these two distributions. Specifically:

Socioeconomic Democracy is a model socioeconomic subsystem in which there is *some form of Universal Guaranteed Personal Income (UGI)* as well as *some form of Maximum Allowable Personal Wealth (MAW)*, with both the lower bound on personal material poverty and the upper bound on personal material wealth **set and adjusted democratically by all participants of society.**

The following description of Socioeconomic Democracy is adapted and developed from the forthcoming book *Socioeconomic Democracy: An Advanced Socioeconomic System* (George, 2001). Some of this and other material are available on the website of the Center for the Study of Democratic Societies at <www.centersds.com>, wherein earlier work is also cited.

Universal Guaranteed Income

In the idealized state of the model, each participant in this democratic socioeconomic system would know that a democratically determined Universal Guaranteed Personal Income (UGI) would always be available. This democratically set, societally guaranteed minimum income could, if society so decided, be sufficient to satisfy the typical individual's minimum subsistence needs. Alternatively, other societies might democratically decide to set the guaranteed amount at only a partial subsistence level, as many proposals in Western Europe now suggest. There are many different versions of UGI, including Basic Income (BI), Citizen's Income (CI), Negative Income Tax (NIT), Participation Income (PI), Citizens Dividend (CD), Social Dividend (SD) and much more, as well as all the Universal Share Ownership Plans (USOPs), which provide income through dividends from universally owned shares of productively employed capital.

Maximum Allowable Wealth

The participants of the democratic socioeconomic system would also understand that all personal material wealth above the democratically determined allowable amount would be transferred out of their ownership and control in a manner specified by the democratically implemented laws of the land. Hence, an insatiable, rationally self-interested extremely wealthy participant in the democratic socioeconomic system, who is at or near the upper bound on allowable personal wealth, would be economically motivated, i.e., have *economic incentive*, to increase the well-being and welfare of the less wealthy members of society. Only in this manner can these (still-wealthiest) participants of society persuade (a majority of) the participants to vote to raise the legal upper limit on allowable personal wealth.

There is, in fact, *strong* economic incentive for those who are pegged at or near the upper limit on allowable personal wealth to be *successful* in improving the general welfare. For if the current level of MAW is *not* producing sufficient improvement in the general welfare, as democratically determined, the democratic society could *reduce* the MAW limit even more in order to enlist even more still-wealthy participants and their even more "excess" wealth in the noble task of effectively improving the well-being of society in general.

The primary effect of a democratically set upper bound on allowable personal wealth is definitely *not* the sudden availability of that previously

private wealth which society has decided to acquire for its general welfare. It is rather the *permanently altered economic incentive* existing for those at or near the upper bound on personal wealth, which aligns the still-wealthy individual's personal economic interest with the economic interest of society in general. The synergy of the society is thus significantly increased.

It is sometimes necessary to emphasize that we are considering here a maximum limit on allowable personal *wealth* and not a limit on allowable personal *income*. The latter is also a possibility, of course, and one which has been explored, advocated and in fact implemented in a variety of situations.

One immediate question is whether the assets acquired by a democratically set MAW limit should go directly to the government or be dispersed directly by the present owners. If the government periodically received payment from individuals in amount equal to how much the individual's personal fortune exceeded the democratically established MAW limit, these funds could be used in a variety of ways from general revenue to financing some desired form of UGI. Other societies may democratically adopt a system whereby the extremely wealthy person being relieved of her excess personal wealth has complete freedom (within legislatively specified options, no doubt) as to how to dispose of this personal excess wealth to benefit society as she sees best.

Democracy

The societal decision-making process employing the principle *one participant, one vote; majority rule* (when used, say, to select between Candidate A or Candidate B or, perhaps in desperation, even Candidate C to some public office) can be usefully viewed as an example of what might be called *qualitative democracy*. As is well known, *qualitative democracy* suffers many possible shortcomings, ranging from being unable to determine an unambiguous majority winner to the problems of "majority tyranny" and including the problems of representation and finance.

There is at present no widely accepted procedure by which each individual participant in a democratic society can directly vote her particular preference for an *amount* or *magnitude* of something in question, with the democratically determined, societally desired *amount* unequivocally resulting. But mathematical economists Duncan Black (1958) and Kenneth Arrow (1963) long ago independently established an important mathematical result in their now classic contributions which shows that the *median value* of the participants' (voters') preference distribution is the

amount the democratic society as a whole is “for” - assuming “single-peakedness.” Roughly speaking, this means that the democratically determined amount is such that half the voters want that much or more while the other half want that much or less. This procedure is here referred to as *quantitative democracy* and is *used* in SeD.

Ramifications

It should be clear that Socioeconomic Democracy would have significant ramifications throughout many realms of human existence and activity. Here, we can simply present a few general observations and enumerate a number of societal problems which appear to be significantly reduced with the realization of *some form of* Socioeconomic Democracy. It is important to fully appreciate the fact that all of these ramifications will occur *simultaneously*. That is, the citizens of a democratic society who adopt some form of SeD will experience a lessening of a *multitude* of serious and expensive societal problems *all at the same time*. This is a natural result of the necessary *systemic* improvement.

Of course, *simultaneous* does not imply *instantaneous*. The time constants of social and behavioral change are measured in years and generations - sometimes even centuries and millennia. But the very real economic incentives created by SeD might be expected to fairly rapidly economically motivate at least all the “rationally self-interested” participants of the assumed democratic society.

The *extent* to which the various societal problems are reduced depends upon many factors. Among these are (1) the specific forms, amounts and details of the two bounds that are democratically adopted and (2) how informed, thoughtful, realistic and effective the citizens of the democratic society are when they democratically establish the two bounds with their votes. In any case, one can easily identify the *direction* of the change (improvement), with the *magnitude* of the change considerably dependent on the above factors as well as other considerations, including the society’s present socioeconomic system (which partially determines the particular mix and severity of its present societal problems) and the nature, amount and availability of resources. As will become evident with thought, however, for practically all the problems and practically all societies, the beneficial effect of Socioeconomic Democracy would appear to be *positive* and *at least significant*.

As described in previous work, the serious societal problems that appear to be more or less ameliorated by democratic installation and operation of SeD include (but are by no means limited to) automation, computerization and robotization; budget deficits and national debts; bureaucracy; maltreatment of children; crime and punishment; development; ecology, environment and pollution; education; maltreatment of the elderly; male domination of the female majority; inflation; international conflict; intranational conflict; involuntary employment; involuntary unemployment; labor strife and strikes; sick medical and health care; military metamorphosis; natural disasters; planned obsolescence; political participation; poverty; racism; sexism; untamed technology; and welfare - as we have heretofore known it.

Physical Realization

The rational study and objective comparison of alternative future possibilities provide the opportunity to make a contribution toward societally desirable societal evolution. However, in order to realize the beneficial potential of research into the nature of possible futures, reasonable care must be exercised in defining the alternatives. The serious student of the future must, of course, be willing to consider presently non-existing situations. Complementing this requirement is the necessity of establishing that the alternatives considered are in fact physically realizable and feasible - and perhaps even democratically achievable.

Briefly, *physical realizability* is easily established in the case of SeD. It can be done by simply indicating the important aspects of the *implementation* process necessary to realize SeD.

Voting Procedure

The precise procedure by which the societally desired bounds on minimum guaranteed personal income and maximum allowable personal wealth could be determined depends, among other things, on the state of technological development of the particular democratic society. An obvious and immediate possibility, applicable almost anywhere, would be appropriately quantized multiple-choice arrays printed on voting ballots.

Administrative Technicalities

The functions and modes of operation required to effectively administer a democratic socioeconomic system would all have to be specified,

designed and implemented through appropriate legislation. Much of the initial and ongoing administrative work would be associated with dismantling one presently existing bureaucracy after another, as inefficient, independent and uncoordinated programs are eliminated or modernized and integrated into the new, fair, simple, universal and democratically established tax and benefit system.

Legal Technicalities

The legal technicalities of establishing and maintaining a democratically determined upper bound on allowable personal wealth and lower bound on guaranteed personal income for all must, of course, be fully satisfied. Legislation prescribing the new and quantified democratic decision-making process would undoubtedly be necessary. The specific details of the laws describing the particular forms of the democratically set upper wealth and lower income limits remain to be delineated and made the law of the land. In all likelihood, various *approximations* to one or more aspects of the ideal theoretical model would in fact be realized and the particular legislation to so do would have to be conceived, written, discussed, thought about, revised, thought about some more, passed and implemented. In some contemporary political systems, a constitutional amendment might be required to properly or explicitly ground all the essential elements of SeD in the constitutional foundation of the society.

Economic Analysis

Using reasonable estimates of the many beneficial effects resulting from democratically established bounds on MAW and UGI, an estimation of the total economic impact should and certainly could be determined *before* system realization. New and societally beneficial avenues of relevant research would, no doubt, be identified. Public opinion polls concerning these and related questions would doubtless prove of considerable value in supplying needed and missing information. The results of such necessarily multidisciplinary analysis could suggest feasible, reasonable and perhaps even optimal values for these bounds. These results, with their supporting analysis, could be made public in a variety of ways with public opinion polls again being employed to supply citizen feedback for what would undoubtedly be an iterative design process.

Political Considerations

Bounds on guaranteed personal income and allowable personal wealth

democratically set can *not* be realized until *at least* a majority of the voting citizens in a contemporary economic system learn about, understand and favor such a *democratic* wealth and income distribution boundary controller subsystem. Actually, it can be anticipated that in more than a few situations, something *far more than a majority* of the citizens of a society will have to favor a democratic resolution of the matter before a democratic resolution of the matter can be realized. Especially if, as discussed earlier, a constitutional amendment is required. It is difficult to think of any historical economic system change of such magnitude that was subjected to such informed public scrutiny prior to voluntary and democratic societal acceptance and adoption as by definition *must* be the case with SeD.

In any case, coalitions of political parties, committed to passage of the necessary legislation, is one possible adoption procedure open in some societies. On the other hand, being an alternative to all existing economic systems, SeD provides a well-defined, humanistic, just and democratic focus about which a new or rejuvenated popular political party could (re)organize and (re)capture political power. Prior to the legal establishment of an actually democratic bound-setting procedure, these political parties could propose specific magnitudes for the bounds, which would reflect their understanding of the *General Will* of that society. At least for the necessary transitional phase, this last scheme might not be an unreasonable approximation to the ideal theoretical model.

Is It Possible?

Yet, some might say: Yes, but what would it *really* take to make all this happen? For example, some might ask: Does the USA need to collapse first? Does the whole world economy need to "go South"? Do the number of people about the planet who daily die of needless starvation need to double? Do the number of people ("combatants," regardless of age, and "innocent civilians," likewise regardless of age) who daily die because of one or more of the stupid worldwide wars need to double? Would doubling it do it? Does the "material" difference between the hard-working and much deserving "well-to-do" and the pathetically, if not pathetic, poor majority of mankind need to be measured not in *billions* but *trillions* of dollars? And so on.

What *indeed* will it take to make SeD happen? Certainly it is the case that *physical realizability* by no means necessarily implies *inevitability*. And even if it did, there are still the important matters of time, urgency and the minimization of unnecessary pain.

Whether or not a particular society *wants* to establish some form of Socioeconomic Democracy for its future will be decided democratically, almost by definition. But to any objection that such fundamental change in existing politicosocioeconomic systems as described here, even if highly desirable, simply couldn't take place, it should perhaps first be noted again that everything that now *is*, at least of human creation, *wasn't* at some time in the past and in fact *wasn't* just a short while ago, on an evolutionary time scale. More specifically, while it was never a valid argument that because politicosocioeconomic system change was *fundamental*, it could *not* take place, in the light of recent geopoliticsocioeconomic sea changes such an argument is demonstrably ludicrous.

Sohail Inayatullah (2000) concludes his thought-provoking discussion of "New Futures Ahead" by sketching three alternative bundles of aspirations "of people all over the world." He characterizes them in three different scenarios, which he calls "globalist," "organic" and "collapse" (followed by establishment of a new "moral" order). His preference is clearly for an "organic global community" - as is this writer's, considering that the list of attributes for the organic scenario includes "Good sex, good food, and regular exercise and meditation." Nevertheless, he suggests the "likely future" remains a "globalist artificial society."

It is respectfully suggested that Socioeconomic Democracy could synergetically combine and help manifest the many unquestionably positive aspects of both Inayatullah's "globalist" and "organic" perspectives. It could also help inhibit the manifestation of the undesirable aspects of the "dark side" of each scenario - with consequences that could eventually lead to a collapse scenario, as can be established by independent thought. It is further respectfully suggested that another name for the "globalist-organic" synthesis is, or at least could be, *Gaia*. As Inayatullah indicates, P.R. Sarkar's insights, Teilhard de Chardin's *Noosphere* (and H.G. Wells' *World Brain*) are being manifest, in these times, through the spirit, reality and co-evolution of the human/internet interaction. Evolutionary leaps are now possible and available that have never existed before.

It would therefore *appear* that it is at least *possible* for a thoughtful society to peacefully, rationally and democratically learn about and bring into being some form of Socioeconomic Democracy - without necessarily having to subject itself to even more excruciatingly painful experiences before it sees and acknowledges the light. Indeed, Socioeconomic Democracy, again by definition, *cannot* be implemented other than by a

peaceful, thoughtful and democratic process. Whether this is an impossible mission or a trivial task, or somewhere in between, it certainly is a personal - and a societal - decision. Faith in the rational process (with all its warts), shared, for example, by the editors, readers and contributors of *JFS* and similarly serious scholarly publications, helps sustain all who abhor the alternative to rationality.

Societal Variations of Socioeconomic Democracy

It should be clear that wide variations in societies (all of which would still be democratic) are possible with Socioeconomic Democracy. Here, we first examine some of the possible theoretical variations of the SeD model. Next, we quickly look at a much larger set of practical political approximations to SeD which, while not strictly satisfying all the requirements of the ideal theoretical model, are nevertheless on a continuum that approaches and to varying degrees approximates the theoretical model.

Observe that if a particular participant in this democratic socioeconomic system were opposed to a societally guaranteed minimum income for all, she could vote to place the lower limit on UGI at *zero*. If a majority of participants so voted, it would be the democratically determined desire of that society to have no UGI. Similarly, any participant who would be opposed to a maximum bound on allowable personal wealth, for any reason, could vote to place that upper limit at, say, *infinity*. A majority so voting would mean that democratic society desired no (finite) MAW.

Four different but still democratic possibilities are therefore immediate. There could be democratic societies wherein (1) reasonable, nontrivial limits on both MAW and UGI were democratically desired and established, (2) an upper limit on MAW but no lower bound on UGI was desired by the society, (3) a lower bound on UGI but no upper limit on MAW was wanted, and (4) no limit on either MAW or UGI was wanted by that society, as democratically determined. We will briefly consider each of these possible situations and attempt to sketch some of the politicosocioeconomic philosophies and biophysical conditions that might be associated with each of these different democratic societies and futures.

Limits on Both MAW and UGI

A democratic society *could* decide to adopt what it considers reasonable and appropriate amounts for both limits. This would, presumably,

have followed a period of public discussion, research, education, thought and action. The ramifications of SeD referred to earlier are, for the most part, the predictable results of significant and effective bounds, democratically established, on both MAW and UGI.

Any society that adopted a reasonable, sustainable and effective upper bound on allowable personal wealth and lower bound on tolerable personal poverty would clearly be demonstrating an understanding of, and a dedication to, meaningful democracy - and all that implies. Such a society would be conscious of the many desirable possibilities stemming from the universal satisfaction of basic human needs. It would be attempting to make the most of humanity's already sufficiently painful historical development and take advantage of the beneficial potentiality.

Societies favoring a healthy, cooperative and synergetic balance of effective government or "public" sector and a strong "private" sector might be inclined to be among the first to democratically adopt and set both a meaningful UGI and a meaningful MAW, especially if they have had some historical experience with fledgling democracy. The gap between the richest and the poorest of such a society could still be significant (as many might claim it should be) but not at all what it is today. Most importantly, the width of that gap would be democratically decided.

Limit on MAW, No Limit on UGI

Some societies might think it best to have, and therefore democratically vote to establish, a finite upper bound on MAW but reject any UGI. Such societies might reason that it is the obligation of all those in the private sector who have been fortunate enough to be materially "successful" to insure the creation of a situation in which *everyone* in society who wants to live a satisfying, productive life has the opportunity - not fleeting but continuous - to do so. They might also be more inclined to have the present owners oversee the distribution of any democratically determined excess personal wealth.

Nevertheless, such a society could democratically reject the idea of directly providing governmentally guaranteed minimum purchasing power for everyone. That society would apparently be willing to risk the possibility that some participants might not be able to find sufficient legal income to sustain and develop themselves, even if they did want to "work" and even if the still wealthy were motivated (by the economic incentive created by the democratically set MAW limit) to try to create satisfying and necessary employment for all who did want to "work." This attitude

might result from the simple fact, honestly faced, that the society at present just does not have enough (resources, knowledge, technology, will, concern or whatever) to provide subsistence - even minimal - for *all* of its present members.

Limit on UGI, No Limit on MAW

Some other societies might democratically decide to have a nonzero lower bound on UGI but no finite upper bound on MAW. Such societies would in general be saying they feel strongly that everyone should be guaranteed at least the *minimum* human essentials including continuing opportunities to develop into healthy and healthily productive people, where those minimum essentials and opportunities are to be democratically determined. Societies inclined to have vigorous "public" sectors might be expected to favor a meaningful and relevant, nonzero lower bound on UGI.

But beyond this, when all minimum essentials *are* satisfied, these societies basically believe that every participant in the democratic socioeconomic system should be free to attempt to accumulate unlimited personal wealth, just as now, if that is what they want or the only thing they know how to do with their lives and so long as it is done legally instead of as before or now. Of course, depending upon the *form* and *amount* of the lower bound actually established, as well as its method of finance, such economic systems may or may not be sustainable in the long run. Indeed, it is this crucial point of finance that has effectively precluded its practical realization so far.

No Limits on Either MAW or UGI

Finally, there is the possible society which has heard about, discussed, thought about, understands and then democratically rejects both limits. This kind of society might be said to have the attitude of not being concerned about the Ultra Rich concentrating as much societal and planetary wealth as the laws, their making, their buying, their bending and their breaking allow and not being concerned about the "disadvantaged" poor who live a million different miseries - with or without dignity - and not being concerned about a shrinking middle class being robbed by some people busily concentrating planetary wealth and some other people busily stealing in an attempt to survive or live at a comfort level suggested by current "consumer" motivating advertising.

Yet such a society would nevertheless be very different from contemporary society which likewise has no such limits. The crucial difference, of course, is that the society which collectively voted for no limits on either MAW or UGI would have given conscious democratic *consent* to living in such a system with such extremes.

Magnitudes of Limits

For the first three of the above four possible categories, quantitative differences in the *magnitudes* of the bounds would provide considerable further variety and healthy experimentation. For example, concerning MAW, different societies could differ as to the degree of “tightness” of that limit. “Loose” control would be where only a few percent of a society are actually pegged at the upper limit on allowable personal wealth. A “tight” control could have, theoretically, up to (but no more than, or it would not be democratic) something like 49 percent of the population pegged at the democratically set MAW limit. The tighter the societal control on the democratically set MAW limit, the lower the bound and the more people constrained at that bound, harnessed, as it were, by self-interest and democracy, to actively work to benefit all society.

Analogous comments can of course be made regarding the lower bound on UGI. Here, “loose” control would be the situation wherein UGI is very small. The loosest of controls is where there is *no* UGI. Tight societal control might be said to exist where the UGI level is democratically set at as high an amount as financially and sustainably possible. Such a situation is described by Philippe Van Parijs (1995) in his courageous and already classic *Real Freedom for All: What (if anything) can justify capitalism?* In both cases, the democratically adjusted MAW level and the UGI level, tight control produces maximal impact. It is the task of each society to democratically decide how much of that maximal impact it thinks it wants at any specific stage of development.

Timing

Consider next the dimension of time. We have already mentioned the possibility that some societies, for a variety of reasons, simply might not have enough resources to provide even minimal subsistence for *all* their members - at least at present. Nevertheless, these societies could certainly establish strong economic incentive, via an effective and fairly tight MAW limit, to maximize production of societally necessary and beneficial goods and services, as democratically determined, in order to mini-

mize unnecessary human suffering and maximize healthy human development. At some future stage of development, it might and eventually would become feasible to then establish a sustainable nonzero UGI. With societally beneficial technological development resulting from SeD, it can be anticipated that such societies might eventually democratically raise both the UGI and the MAW limits at appropriate times in the future.

Approximations to UGI

Regarding Universal Guaranteed Personal Income, it is well known that there are numerous particular forms of UGI, with just a few of them listed above. All these particular schemes approximate the theoretical ideal of UGI to a relatively high though varying degree. Of course, none of these systems, as originally proposed, suggested that the amount of the guaranteed income be set *democratically*. Note that a society could allocate to each individual at birth a certain amount of resources to be drawn upon and received by that particular participant when and as needed or desired.

Somewhat more distant but also more politically possible and immediate approximations to "pure" UGI are obtained by relaxing in turn each of its defining attributes. For example, one approximation to Universal Guaranteed *Income* is Universally Guaranteed *Goods and Services*. Universal public education is a very real form of Universal Partial Basic Income, with the *service* in lieu of *income* being the governmentally funded and provided public education during certain portions of a person's life. Universal medical care, likewise available in *almost* all self-proclaimed civilized societies, is another approximation to UGI; it too is a form of PBI.

Instead of *unqualified* UGI, various approximations stipulate satisfaction of particular requirements or qualifications. For example, a democratically adopted *approximation* to UGI could require some form of community, national or even global service to be eligible. The program could require the taking of some kind of education or training for eligibility. Brazil is currently considering a proposal to provide guaranteed income to families who will send their children to school.

Approximations to MAW

Concerning popular approximations to Maximum Allowable Personal Wealth, seemingly the closest thing to a *limit* on personal wealth is a tax on personal wealth. Vance Packard (1989), in his illuminating *The Ultra Rich: How Much Is Too Much?*, notes the great increase in large fortunes occurring at a time when the real assets of the average person are declin-

ing and asks the logical question: “[W]hy do we not put a direct tax on wealth?” As Packard points out, this is not a revolutionary proposal. About sixteen countries now have some direct tax on wealth (or net worth). Most are advanced European democracies. Packard later asks another logical question. “What about a wealth tax that would have the effect of putting a cap on great private wealth that can be accumulated?” He then proposes that as a long-term goal we might reasonably work toward phasing in a tax structure that includes a progressive annual tax on that part of the net worth of an individual which exceeds a certain very high base.

Another familiar form of a tax on wealth, the Inheritance or Estate Tax, is in effect a time-delayed tax on wealth. As such, it is therefore also an *approximation* to a limit on wealth. A slightly different nuance, there are also proposals for a *limit* on inheritance.

Approximations to Democracy

Approximations to democracy, like approximations to anything else, can be fairly close or fairly distant. Fairly distant approximations to democracy, while they may last a long time and indeed seem determined to last forever, are seldom satisfying and, in the long run, clearly unstable and unsustainable. Whether “representative” democracy is a fairly close approximation to democracy or a fairly wide deviation from democracy would appear to be situation-dependent. Of course, both Proportional Representation (PR) and Direct Democracy (DD), well established in some societies, are now actively being explored in others.

An approximation to *all* participants of society *democratically* setting the UGI and MAW limits would be having only those at least 18 years of age, say, vote to decide the magnitudes of these two bounds. Another kind of approximation to direct *quantitative* democracy, mentioned earlier and related to implementation, is that of different political parties offering to the public their opinions of what the democratic desire of the total society would, could or perhaps should be regarding the upper bound on allowable personal wealth and the lower bound on universal guaranteed personal income. If democratic procedures were followed to determine ascendancy to political power, it would seem the winning political party might, in some sense at least, be said to have spoken for the democratic society as a whole - at least approximately.

References

- Arrow, Kenneth. 1963. *Social Choice and Individual Values*, 2nd Edn. John Wiley & Sons.
- Black, Duncan. 1958. *The Theory of Committees and Elections*. Cambridge University Press.
- George, Robley E. 2001. *Socioeconomic Democracy: An Advanced Socioeconomic System*. Praeger.
- Gilbert, Richard S. 1991. *How Much Do We Deserve? An Inquiry in Distributive Justice*. University Press of America.
- Inayatullah, Sohail. 2000. "New Futures Ahead" in *Futures Bulletin* v26, n3. World Futures Studies Federation.
- Jefferson, Thomas. [1785] 1984. "Letter to James Madison" in Peterson, Merrill D. *Thomas Jefferson: Writings*. Library of America.
- Packard, Vance. 1989. *The Ultra Rich: How Much Is Too Much?* Little, Brown and Company.
- Paine, Thomas. [1791] 1961. *Rights of Man*. Heritage.
- Roberts, Keith. 1983. *Automation, Unemployment and the Distribution of Income*. European Centre for Work and Society.
- Van Parijs, Philippe. 1995. *Real Freedom for All: What (if anything) can Justify Capitalism?* Oxford University Press.