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## REPUBLICANISM AND DOMINATION BY CAPITAL<sup>2</sup>

### Abstract

*This article is a review of the contemporary 'leftist' republican project. The project stands on two legs, and we examine them both in turn. The first leg is a novel reading of history. This reading suggests, on the one hand that, contrary to some popular assumptions, republicanism does have a leftist, even a radical stream. But on the other hand, it also suggests that several authors and movements that did not self-identify as republicans actually did, in fact, employ a characteristically republican thinking. The second leg of the project is a normative one. It is essentially an attempt by political philosophers to demonstrate that there is something in republican theory from which all these leftist, even radical streams spring forth. Primarily, it is suggested that it is republicanism's sensitivity to the freedom-restricting role of great inequalities of power that provides the normative resource for the development of a characteristically republican critique of capital and capitalism. We briefly review the main arguments in favor of these claims, and also, as a conclusion, raise a few challenges that the 'leftist' republican project potentially faces.*

**Keywords:** *republicanism, domination, socialism, Marx, trade unions*

### Introduction

Republicanism is a rich and rather diverse tradition. Its links to elitist, even aristocratic politics are fairly well known – you might think of Cicero and the

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patrician republicans of Rome, some of the early modern English revolutionaries, but also the American *Founding Fathers*. Less well known however is that republicanism has a “leftist” tradition, also – into which, arguably, you might include the Roman plebeians, as well as Machiavelli, Rousseau, perhaps Marx, certain trade unions from 19<sup>th</sup> century America and others. And in fact (in modern times at least), many on this “leftist” side have employed the language of republicanism to no less a political aim, but the radical critique of capitalism, the transformation of labor and the like. For if freedom is to be attained then perhaps “there is to be a people in industry, as in government” (Lloyd 1963, 183). But how is this possible? How can a tradition so famously linked to elitism also be used as a weapon against capital? What is there in republican theory that may explain this phenomenon? In the past years, considerable effort has been put into answering these questions by a number of authors such as Alex Gourevitch, Bruno Leipold, James Muldoon, Karma Nabulsi, Tom O’Shea, Michael J. Thompson, Nicholas Vrousalis, and Stuart White. In this review we provide a short sketch of their overall project. First, drawing on mainstream contemporary historiography, we set the outlines of what is usually counted as ‘republicanism’ in the first place, and what may interest leftists from that. Second and third, we briefly introduce two better known candidates for ‘anti-capitalist republicanism’, namely the already mentioned trade unions on the one hand, and Karl Marx on the other. Fourth, we turn to the normative level of the issue, and discuss possible republican concerns about capitalism. The essence of these concerns is that capitalism is a system characterized by relations of dominating power – and since republicans are opposed to domination *in general*, they should be opposed to capitalism too. Fifth and finally, we place the project in its wider *discursive* framework, and ask whether the contemporary left has anything new to gain from the republican revival, and also whether this revival really has, as some suggest, a polemic edge against so-called mainstream liberalism.

### 1. What is Republicanism?

So, what *is* it? Contemporary republicanism is a movement of *revival*, namely the revival of a tradition that spans thousands of years, but one that has experienced an eclipse at a certain point in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, giving way to liberalism, conservatism, and socialism. Indeed, this eclipse has for some time determined the points of reference for historical research too – republicanism, simply put, was often seen as a form of proto-liberalism rather than a tradition *sui generis*. But this assertion has been seriously questioned ever since the 1970s and 80s, essentially by historians linked to the so-called *Cambridge School*: J. G. A. Pocock (Pocock 1975), but also his students, most notably Quentin Skinner.

According to them, a distinct republican tradition *does* exist, with figures arguably included figures such as Aristotle, Cicero, the brothers Gracchus, Livy, Polybius, Machiavelli from renaissance Italy, English and American revolutionaries, or supporters of the revolutions such as Harrington, Sidney, Milton, the *Founding Fathers*, all the way to Montesquieu, Rousseau, and Hannah Arendt. But the list keeps getting longer and longer still. Followers (and indeed, critics) of Skinner have stipulated that several others may also be counted republican: the levellers, the diggers, Locke, Spinoza, Hegel, Marx, even Hayek (Irving 2020; Leipold 2020; Bohman 2010; Prokhovnik 2004; Herold 2013). What do they all have in common that may arguably tie them into a tradition? According to Skinner, Pettit, and others, at least, the main common characteristic is the belief that hierarchy, great inequality of power, or as is commonly put, *domination*, is an offence against liberty itself. This is certainly something that liberals for their part would never accept: their assertion is that liberty requires immunity not from domination, but rather immunity from *interference* only. In the liberal mind, the characteristic barrier to freedom is the law (which interferes, permits, forbids, or sanctions). Not so in the republican mind. The latter claims that interference (say, the law) *per se* is not necessarily a barrier to freedom, but only if it also dominates – for instance, if the law-making process is dominated by an elite, and if everyone doesn't have equal power, or an equal say in it. However, if everybody *does* have an equal say, then regardless of its interfering nature, the law is in fact *not* a barrier to freedom, but rather an expression of the autonomous will of the political community.

This sensitivity to the freedom-restricting role of hierarchies is also primarily what makes republicanism interesting to the left. Another element that does so is its purportedly solid *democratic* potential (see: Leipold–Nabulsi–White, 2020). Contemporary republicans, not much unlike communitarians 20 or 30 years ago, tend to suggest that liberals partially have themselves to blame for the crisis of civic virtue, community, and the democratic ethos. In a nutshell, liberal freedom will not do as a basis for any of these things, at the end of the day because of its insensitivity to domination. Logically speaking at least, non-interference does not require democracy – in theory, it may be provided by a benevolent autocrat too. So, what then do you need virtue and community for? Non-domination is different, however. The specific sort of power relation that it implies simply cannot be attained without everybody having an equal say. It is, therefore, *logically* linked to democracy, and thus to a somewhat perfectionist stance towards issues of virtue-cultivation as well. Aside from the domination-element, contemporary leftist republicans commonly draw on this assumption too. They argue, in effect, that republicanism is a useful tool for the

justification of traditionally leftist policies such as, say, workplace democracy. But this is something we will not get into in detail here. Our focus is on the domination element.

## **2. Radicalizing the Heritage: 19<sup>th</sup> Century Labor Republicanism**

What of the historical record, then? To be sure, in order to elaborate the contours of a new, ‘labor’ republicanism, or any kind of opposition to capital for that matter, modern republicans needed to get rid of some of the historical residua. Republicanism had a strong elitist and aristocratic stream ever since Graeco-roman antiquity. According to this, only those were to be considered fully *sui juris* (their own masters) who did not have to deal with (coerced) labor, neither as “slaves by nature”, nor as “slaves by habit”. However, the independence of “leisured gentlemen” (Leo Strauss), including their free engagement in public life, presupposed the mass dependence upon slaves. This was seen as natural by many republican thinkers and politicians since Sallust and Cicero all the way to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. ‘Leisure’ required wealth – that is to say, the possibility *not* to have to work. Wealth was commonly perceived as wealth in land. But land needs to be worked – and if not by the gentlemen themselves, then who else, but the slaves? Again, reasoning such as this were widely considered natural.

Of course, the elitist stream was never the only one, and even *within* the elitist stream certain alternatives existed. In a way, all the modern revolutions that were opposed to absolute monarchy or to colonial government, had a republican and even “leftist” nuance, at least comparatively speaking. Rosa Luxemburg even went as far as to state that “every socialist is naturally a republican” (as cited by Muldoon 2019, 4). It is also true that pre-capitalist forms of (namely, usurers’ and merchants’) capital were sometimes subjected to republican critique, albeit in a mediated way, through the critique of corruption and especially luxury. Virtue and commerce were commonly understood by republicans to be at odds with one another *in potentia*. But much more interesting to us are those republican ideas and practices that were somehow opposed to capital itself, either in the spirit of *Arbeiterbewegung*, or as a critique of its abstract aspects within mature capitalism.

On a more theoretical level, labor republicans such as the *Knights of Labor* attempted to do what many in modernity (say, pro-market republicans also) had already attempted before them: the universalization of republican freedom. This was certainly not an easy thing to do. If freedom really *did* require a degree of wealth, not to mention leisure time, then some practical solution needed to be devised that would provide for everyone what slavery had provided for the few (Gourevitch 2015). Their solution was the ‘republicanizing’ of labor. Practically speaking, this meant pretty much the same thing that any old socialist

would have meant by ‘socializing’ at the time: worker ownership over the means of production, the equalizing of property etc. But nevertheless, the republican argument *justifying* these practices had a characteristic twist to it. It stated that what was wrong with wage labor was precisely its *freedom*-restricting nature: wage-laborers and capital owners’ stand in an unequal relation of power, with the latter dominating the former. Therefore, wage labor was merely a new, albeit voluntary form of slavery – an instrument of economic subjection and servitude. Arguably, workers were *forced* to make a contract with their employers, as economic need compelled them to sell their labor. As George McNeil put it, workers “assent but they do not consent, they submit but do not agree” (as cited by Gourevitch 2020). They are, therefore, free only in a *formal* sense. And the end result of the whole process is, of course, unequal control over productive activity (employees have to obey), exploitation and the like. All the results of a domination-issue.

Now, labor republicans did not necessarily criticize the essential profit-maximizing logic of capital. Perhaps they only hoped that in the cooperative commonwealth “laborer and capitalist will be one” and expropriators will be expropriated, without getting rid of the abstract self-valorization of capital itself. They put the accent on dependent and enslaved classes, and not on abstract social mechanisms. To put it differently, they often understood domination as a mere *Klassenbeziehung*-issue, that is to say, as the personal or group domination of selfish – and sometimes even cruel – capitalists (to which they opposed their “higher morality” and work ethic), but ignored some of the more structural forms of power.

### 3. Was Marx a Republican?

As we mentioned, though, the ongoing reinterpretation of the republican tradition by historians does not only include efforts to uncover its ‘leftist’ side, but also efforts to point to certain closet republicans too, so to speak – republicans who do not or did not know what they actually were. Possible candidates are many: Locke, Spinoza, Hegel, but certainly, the most important figure for the left in this case, as usual, is Karl Marx. Quentin Skinner himself suggests that Marx employed a neo-Roman (or republican) vocabulary when he spoke of wage-slavery, alienation, or the dictatorship of the proletariat (Marshall-Skinner 2020). But Skinner is far from being alone with his contention. It is now widely speculated that Marx not only made use of neo-Roman rhetorical tropes, but was also inspired by certain 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century American, English and French labor republicans – for example, he relied on the work of Thomas Hamilton, a former colonel, and thus, in a mediated way, on the work Thomas

Skidmore, and Owenism also (Gourevitch 2020; Hunt 1974; Isaac 1990). Further, as Norman Arthur Fisher highlights, Marx also drew on Lewis Henry Morgan's research on Roman and Greek republicanism, as well as on his research on simpler versions of tribal and clan democracy (Fischer 2015, 30–32). One might wonder whether we can characterize Marx's theory as 'radical republican' (or perhaps as "German communitarian") in nature, at least in some of its phases. It is sometimes highlighted that Marx relied on some of the (purported) classics of republicanism too, such as Machiavelli, the advocate of civic virtue, Rousseau the supporter of the non-representative self-legislation of the people, and of course Hegel, who affirmed the public ethics of *Sittlichkeit* (Thompson 2015, 1–21). Detailed interpretations are few, however. Perhaps two of the most important are the works of William Clare Roberts on the one hand, and Bruno Leipold on the other. Roberts essentially draws attention to how Marx criticized dominating, freedom-restricting power in capitalism (Roberts 2017). Indeed, it *may* be pointed out that by emphasizing the importance of extractive power and surplus benefits within capitalism, Marx *explicitly* described the relations implied by wage-labor as a type of enslavement. "The Roman slave was held by chains; the wage-laborer is bound to his owner by invisible threads. The appearance of independence is maintained by a constant change in the person of the individual employer, and by the legal fiction of a contract" (Marx 1977, 719). But Roberts touches upon something else too. He claims that in fact, Marx's critique of the more abstract forces of domination *also* has a republican twist to it – that is to say, the critique of the profit-maximizing logic which dominates capitalist and wage-laborer alike. Arguably, even the analysis of fetishism is an account of impersonal domination (in the republican sense) and reification in which the abstract aspects of value are falsely represented as the intrinsic value of things (Roberts 2017, 52–85.).

Leipold on the other hand focuses primarily on the vocabulary and the democratic credentials of Marx's theory (Leipold 2020). True, Marx was very critical of modern (bourgeois) republics for their neglect of social emancipation. It is pointed out by authors other than Leipold as well (for instance, by Isaac 1990) that Marx was certainly critical of the anachronistic and farcical resuscitation of "Roman costumes" and the empty appraisal of old public virtues (or the 'republican' critique of corruption too) as being incapable of dealing with the challenges of modern market society, class struggles, and forms of "emancipated slavery". He also emphasized that in a merely *political* republic (as advocated by classical republicans) the material well-being of the remaining subsystems (economy, legality, etc.) is not ensured and this kind of government is simply unable to face the abstract forces and structural determinations of the

capitalist society. To put it simply, Marx criticized the ideology of political republicanism and patriotism (for instance, that of the *Young Hegelians*) as being full of illusions, and he did this from the perspective of a more general human emancipation, accentuating that in a bourgeois republic, there still is a dominating class, and a bureaucracy too, for that matter).

But perhaps Marx was, at the same time, offering a characteristically republican critique of these republics too – so argues Leipold. It is one thing that as a young political publicist he refused all kinds of monarchy and established privilege and supported political ideas such as popular sovereignty and universal suffrage instead. But Leipold suggests that Marx's later *positive* theory also bears the marks of some form of republicanism – and arguing in favor of this thesis he presents, primarily, the famous pamphlet on the *Paris Commune*. In it, Marx explicitly advocates a 'real republic', a 'social republic', one where public officials have short-termed and imperative mandates, where they are easy to recall, where the legislative branch has primacy, where administrative and repressive functions (such as the army and the police) are controlled by the people and so on. To repeat then, Leipold argues that it is the *democratic element* which makes Marx's positive theory republican in a way.

What conclusions are to be drawn from all this is, of course, up for debate? We briefly return to this in the concluding section of our review. But, of course, the question is rather complicated. For instance, *pace* Arendt, was Marx trying not to end Western political thought after all, but on the contrary, was he trying to criticize capitalism with his own purported republican insights in the background? Was he really attempting to formulate a 'red' or 'social republicanism' in opposition to other forms of republicanism? (Isaac) Or was his engagement with republicanism, and indeed, with democracy, merely of a *tactical* character instead? (Mager 1984; Honneth 2017, 45, 129–130, 135–136, 170–171).

#### **4. Forms of Capitalist Domination: Concrete and Abstract**

Leaving aside debates on history, however, contemporary 'leftist' republicanism is a *normative* project also. We now return to this aspect of it. To recall, proponents of the project argue, albeit in somewhat various ways, that the primary reason republicans ought to be worried about capitalism is that it is characterized by dominating power relations. So, if republicans are to be true to their word and wish to curb *all* sorts of domination, then they certainly ought to be critical not merely of the public (thus, state-related) forms of domination, but of its private or economic forms also. But what does this mean specifically? We suggest that republican concerns may be divided into two categories: concerns about *concrete* domination on the one hand and concerns about more *abstract*

sorts of domination on the other. We examine these in turn and also present some of the possible antidotes that republicans tend to offer against them. What, then, of the various forms of domination? First, 'leftist' republicans speak of concrete relations within the workplace itself. These relations are obviously dominating, say, if relative power between employer and employee is so uneven that the latter may lose his/her job because of a Facebook comment, but also, if workers are denied suitable protection from harm or even bathroom breaks. But such things are perhaps merely consequences. The underlying issue is this: in private companies, power exercised within the organizational structure of the workplace always has a more or less asymmetric relation, with wage-laborers being potentially at the mercy of their bosses. The means of production are not the property of workers. The work process itself is supervised and regulated by those who belong to a higher level in the hierarchy of the factory. The product produced by the laborer appears as an "alien essence". Finally, the benefits of work are *extracted* – there is, thus, unilateral exploitation, extractive domination, unequal and unreciprocated exchange. Imperatives and servitude within this field of "private government" are emphatically embodied in personal commandments and personal dependence (Wood 2016; Arneson 2016; Roemer 1982; Reiman 1987, 3-41). Most contemporary 'leftist' republicans would solve issues of domination within the workplace either by *workplace democracy*, or *workplace constitutionalism*, or perhaps some combination of the two. Thus, they argue in favor of employees having a say in company matters and/or for laws protecting worker interests (Dagger 2006; Gourevitch 2016; Gonzalez-Ricoy; McIvor 2009; Petit 2006; Petit 2007; Hsieh 2005; Anderson 2005). A second kind of concrete domination, nevermind relation within the workplace itself, is when the distribution of resources is radically unequal *in the market*. Given such conditions, the labor contract may never be considered fair: employers and capitalists have a far better bargaining position than those looking for work. This regularity has as a consequence low wages, uncompensated dangers in the workplace for and the like (Thompson 2013, 287; Vrousalis 2016). What's more, certain republicans go even so far as to suggest that inequalities of resource in the market may be detrimental to freedom even if there is no prospect of a labor contract. As Vrousalis argues, if these inequalities are so severe that some actors may arbitrarily control the conditions of transactions, say, between independent entrepreneurs too, then we have enough reason to assume that relations are somewhat dominated (Vrousalis 2020). Neither workplace democracy, nor constitutionalism solve related issues in any way. Thus, 'leftist' republicans offers several further solutions: state intervention, redistribution, basic income, or more radically, the abolition of private property.

Third, many republicans suggest that domination may manifest itself in an abstract form as well. Most notably, in capitalism all actors are affected, rich and poor, worker and capitalist alike, by the abstract logic of profit maximization. This logic orients the lives of nearly all. As Marx suggests, “[t]he capitalist is just as enslaved by the capitalist relationship as is his opposite pole” (Marx 1977, 990) (this is why some thinkers, such as Roberts (Roberts 2017, 103), argue that the wage-laborer is the “slave of a slave”). Regardless of the behavior of concrete agents, their structural agential dispositions and opportunity sets (Lovett 2010; Rahman 2017, 47-49; Schuppert 2015, 440-455), can *a priori* be described as dependency and servitude – as something that serves the abstract self-valorization and reproduction of value and capital as an end-in-itself. As Moishe Postone formulates it by relying upon Marx’s analysis, “the form of social domination that characterizes capitalism is not ultimately a function of private property, of the ownership by the capitalists of the surplus product and the means of production; rather, it is grounded in the value form of wealth itself, a form of social wealth that confronts living labor (the workers) as a structurally alien and dominant power” (Postone 1993, 30). Similarly, Robert Kurz in his *Domination without a Subject* tells us that “even the rulers are ruled; in actuality, they never rule for their own needs or wellbeing, but for something that is simply transcendent. In this they always harm themselves and achieve something alien and obviously superficial. Their alleged appropriation of wealth is transformed into self-mutilation” (Kurz 2020).

According to his theoretical framework, the structural objectivity of domination surpasses the existing subjects, and this is especially true in the case of mature capitalism when the domination of man by man becomes less and less important. Kurz carefully makes a distinction between the outdated bourgeois-enlightened concept of domination and the abstract concept of domination that fits the 21<sup>st</sup> century better, where capitalist relations are more and more subjectless and automated.

The profit-maximizing logic is not being manufactured by some ‘ruling class’, however. On the contrary, capital, as Robert Kurz put it, is an ‘automated subject’ (Kurz 2020; cf. Thompson 2015, 287). Here again, moderate ‘leftist’ republicans wish to deal with problems related to this through state intervention, redistribution, or perhaps the introduction of a basic income scheme (Birnbbaum, Casassas 2008). All of these measures are intended to provide the opportunity not to have to work, that is, and to be exempt from the need to maximize profit. The radical take a step further and claim that as long as there is private property in the economy, domination is here to stay (Vrousalis 2019, 5-11). Some say that true republican freedom may only be attained in socialism (O’Shea 2019, 8-9).

What these radicals suggest is that the social system preferable to capitalism is certainly not one in which the laborer becomes the capitalist. Rather, it is one that breaks up with capital altogether (for otherwise, subsumption to abstract value still remains). For as Vrousalis puts it, “capitalist domination can conceivably survive the removal of capitalists” (Vrousalis 2013, 157).

Fourth and finally, ‘leftists’ regularly suggest that domination may have an *ideological* variant also. This is something that has been widely debated in Marxist theory (Eagleton 1991; cf. Žižek 1994). For our purposes it is important that it is even debated whether this sort of domination is to be counted concrete or abstract. Is there a ruling class that indoctrinates? Or is ideology something that is being reproduced in some other way? Whatever the case may be, the essential point is this: in capitalist societies, through a string of systematized and routinized actions, human beings internalize a set of views supporting the hierarchical order (Thompson 2015, 284-6; cf. Muldoon 2019, 2020). This process has its advantages and its disadvantages too. The main advantage is that it molds human beings into functional members of society. The disadvantage is that it potentially legitimizes exploitation and hierarchy and presents capitalism as a *natural* rather than a *historic* phenomenon. There are two ways in which ideological domination may be conceived as a domination proper. On the one hand, human beings do not have full control, in fact, many have very little control, over the process in which dominant views are formed and rehearsed, and on the other, the consequence of the whole process is precisely the strengthening of hierarchies, and the weakening of the prospects of opposition to them.

To sum up, normatively speaking, republican critics of capitalism, contemporary or otherwise, tend to suggest two sorts of things. On the one hand, they suggest that there is concrete domination in the workplace, in the market, and perhaps on an ideological sphere too. On the other hand, some of them suggest that there is an abstract form of domination as well. To be sure, such things may be expressed independently of one another; indeed, they frequently are and were, and not just by republicans either. As Gourevitch shows, many labor republicans, for example, condemned capitalist relations only because of servitude within the workplace (Gourevitch 2015). They merely wanted to replace domination by capitalists or bosses with collective ownership. They criticized concrete manifestations of arbitrary will only and did not pay much attention to structural determinations. On the other hand, criticism of abstract domination can function very well without criticism of concrete forms. One might easily suppose that the logic of the self-valorization of capital may remain existent despite the introduction of worker cooperatives, and one might also come to the conclusion (and this is merely the other side of the same coin) that cap-

italist workplaces could serve their purpose without arbitrary interference of any sort. Of course, these two perspectives do not *have to be* separated, on the contrary, they may be combined in a carefully mediated way. For instance, it may be suggested that the asymmetry at the workplace is itself determined by structural power-dispositions. Or, more generally, it might also be concluded that “the structural dependence of the wage-laborer was translated, through the labor contract, to a more personal form of servitude to the employer” (Gourevitch 2020).

### **5. What Use for the Left? What Polemic Edge Against Liberalism?**

But what use does all of this have for the left today? For let us not forget that the whole project we sketch above fits into a wider discourse also. This is the discourse of a left trying to find its way, experimenting with various theoretical tools from Hegelian dialectics all the way to forms of immanent critique and the like. The project of anti-capitalist republicanism is but a new episode of this long-standing debate. So, what use does it have? The precise answer remains to be seen, of course. But still, we raise a few arguments in its favor, as well as possible objections to it. Of course, historical findings themselves may, sometimes, have a subversive nature. Words used in common parlance may be attributed new meaning, or more precisely, their original ambiguity may be reattributed to them again. The uncovering of the ‘republican Marx’, or that of ‘labor republicanism’ in general could be useful for the left insofar as it potentially weakens the narrative according to which such a great tradition as that of republicanism belongs to the mainstream only (that is to say, capitalism), but not to its enemies.

Arguably however, the link between republicanism and the (socialist) left is defensible not merely historically, but on a normative level also. The two are not at odd is principle, in fact as Muldoon shows, they are quite compatible. As we have seen, the primary reason for this has to do with the anti-hierarchy, anti-domination content of republicanism, which may indeed be radicalized, and turned into a weapon against the capitalist mode of production, the bourgeois state and so much more. Muldoon’s article is also a good example to suggest that republicanism helps out on a *normative* level. This is something that the left has famously struggled with: what to do *instead*? What ought to take the place of ‘capitalist democracy’? Republicanism provides at least one possible answer: any post-capitalist society ought to have a state, albeit a socialist state, one that is democratically controlled, dismantles the army, and provides its citizens with opportunities for participation in the various self-governing bodies, real ownership over their lives, and immunity from ideological indoctrination and so on.

All of these things are, however, considered fairly commonplace on the (radical) left. This is not to say that they are acceptable to everybody therein. It is merely to say that they are well known, and also fairly *widely* accepted. Where republicans seem to offer an alternative, therefore, is not so much with regards to practical suggestions, but more with regards to their justification. They show, in effect, that what is primarily wrong with capitalism is its freedom-restricting character. Also, the reason why some of the mentioned socialist practices are to be preferred is precisely their ability to enhance freedom itself. So what? Is this really all that original? Perhaps on a rather abstract level it is. But practically speaking, not particularly. The obvious objection by some leftists could be that if republican normativity merely explains why some of the already widely accepted practices might be considered right and justified, then it does not, in effect, take us all that far.

Even more serious problems might arise as well, however. Just how close *is* the link between republicanism and the left, the left being understood in a rather general way? Is it really the case, as Stuart White seems to suggest, that 'leftist' republicans differ from those on the 'right' merely insofar as they actually *do* draw the correct conclusions from their principles, and do not stop halfway? (White 2011, 561-579). Is the difference really that they extend the demands of the non-domination ideal on the private as well as the public sphere, unlike the moderates, who criticize merely public (state) domination? This is actually far from obvious. For one, there are good reasons to suggest that market relations should not be interpreted as dominating at all (Pettit 2006, 131-149). So, it is perhaps not so much that outright pro-market republicans (one of whom is Hayek, purportedly) are necessarily inconsistent, but rather that they do not believe that the left's solutions really serve their ideals better (see Irving 2020). In other words, what they *do* believe is not necessarily that certain forms of domination are acceptable while others are not, but rather that pro-market policies reduce overall domination far better than state intervention does, not to mention the abolishing of private property. They may yet be wrong about this. But if they are then their position is not inconsistent as republican but merely flawed as a description of reality. If they really *are* wrong, then *all* pro-market advocates are wrong, liberals and conservatives included. But of course, it is far from evident that this should be the case. The empirical evidence is famously ambiguous – and this is precisely the reason why we still have debates on economic policy. Therefore, it is also far from evident that a consistent republican ought to be on the left.

One has also to keep in mind that the 'leftist' republican project fits into yet another discourse too, namely the *republican revival* itself, which emerged

essentially as a critique of liberalism. So, what the 'leftists' need to show is not merely that their position attains socialist goals, but also that it attains the goals *any* sort of republicanism ought to. What we have in mind of course is providing an alternative to so-called mainstream liberalism. Now, this goal might not be all that easy to attain, however. Even on a historical level, it is far from obvious that the republican tradition is somehow closer to the left than liberalism is. Ever since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, liberalism has had a powerful stream advocating public ownership, strong workers' rights, redistribution, and the like (Ryan 2015, 59-84).

But putting history aside, the problem is also present on a normative level. For it is in fact far from obvious that liberal theory is, as is suggested, totally insensitive to the freedom-restricting effect of hierarchies. To be fair, liberals do, indeed, maintain that freedom *itself* does not require the absence of such hierarchies. However, they do *not*, or probably incredibly rarely do believe that the *enjoyment* of freedom also does not require the absence of severe inequalities. Rawls, for one, makes this pretty clear. This is, anyway, the whole point behind liberals incorporating an equality-principle into their theories of justice, next to the freedom-principle. True, certain (distributive) conceptions of equality *are*, or seem to be insensitive to the domination problem. But perhaps not all of them are. *Relational* conceptions (say, those of Samuel Scheffler, Elizabeth Anderson, or others) are not for instance. And this might apparently be bad news for 'leftist' republicans. It might suggest that *polemically* speaking their project is ineffective, for the anti-hierarchy content they believe to be the main advantage of republicanism *in general*, is in fact not an 'advantage' after all. It might be, actually, something they could easily agree upon with many contemporary liberals. It also might follow that if it is essentially his critique of hierarchies that makes Marx a republican, then by the same token, he might also be called a liberal too. This would seem to be a rather odd conclusion. Therefore, if they are to maintain the polemic edge of their conception (instead of going for mere normative attractiveness), then what socialist republicans need to show is that there is something about liberalism that makes it utterly incompatible with the critique of hierarchies. Something, in other words, that makes the 'relational' conception of equality in fact *non-liberal*. We are not familiar with any real attempt to show this. Thus, for now, the onus of proof remains with (socialist) republicans.

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