



The Socialist Imperative: From Gotha to Now

Michael Lebowitz

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In a little more than a decade, economist Michael A. Lebowitz has written several major works about the transition from socialism to capitalism: *Beyond Capital* (winner of the Deutscher Prize), *Build It Now*, *The Socialist Alternative*, and *The Contradictions of "Real Socialism."* Here, he develops and deepens the analysis contained in those pathbreaking works by tracing major issues in socialist thought from the nineteenth century through the twenty-first.

Lebowitz explores the obvious but almost universally ignored fact that as human beings work together to produce society's goods and services, we also "produce" something else: namely, ourselves. Human beings are shaped by circumstances, and any vision of socialism that ignores this fact is bound to fail, or, at best, reproduce the alienation of labor that is endemic to capitalism. But how can people transform their circumstances in a way that allows them to re-organize production and, at the same time, fulfill their human potential? Lebowitz sets out to answer this question first by examining Marx's *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, and from there investigates the experiences of the Soviet Union and more recent efforts to build socialism in Venezuela. He argues that socialism in the twenty-first century must be animated by a central vision, in three parts: social ownership of the means of production, social production organized by workers, and the satisfaction of communal needs and communal purposes. These essays repay careful reading and reflection, and prove Lebowitz to be one of the foremost Marxist thinkers of this era.

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