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January 28, 2012: A New Marxism

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Title: A New Marxism

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1/28/2012—When I was asked by Religion Dispatches what I expected to be working on next, after Church and State, I responded "I hope to be able one day to write a serious book challenging the assumptions of capitalism on behalf of a resurgent Marxism." So, as I wrote last September, I have been pondering what a resurgent Marxism might be like. Well, I don't have to ponder this question anymore. I just bought *Envisioning Real Utopias* by Erik Olin Wright. Wright is a Professor of Sociology at Wisconsin. In fact he is the current President of the American Sociological Association. I have only read a few pages, but I can already tell this is a great book. Very readable. Very accessible. Wright's basic themes are hope and democracy. Things can be different from the way they are and there are things we can do and actions we can take. The problem with Occupy Wall Street was always its lack of vision. I don't mean details but even hints. Did the protestors want a new world or a 25% marginal tax rate for the rich? I have come to the conclusion that a new world must be the goal. Capitalism has done great things, but all in all, from its climate changing consumption, to its dehumanized consciousness, to its roller coaster recessions, to its outsized inequality, to its international competition, I don't think it is worth it. There must be a better way. I had an email exchange with Wright about the role of religion in all this. I told him that the secular/religion divide seemed to me to be preventing the formation of a genuinely radical political coalition. I don't think he will mind my repeating here part of his response: "it is important to transcend the false dichotomies of secular/religious in forging coalitions for social justice and social transformation. At the level of the deepest meanings that make life coherent and humane the distance between religious and secular sensibilities is often negligible." I couldn't have said it better. In fact I never have said it better.