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Contents

domination of their followers, and for their reformism. With such reasons, I think, the Anarchist Communist Federation of the UK changed its name to the Anarchist Federation. The Irish Workers Solidarity Movement obviously does not include Communist in its name. Leaving Communist out of our name does not necessarily mean abandoning the communist tradition.

I think the United States falls into the second category. Putting Communist in our name just creates unnecessary barriers between ourselves and most U.S. workers. It makes it more difficult to distinguish ourselves from statist tendencies which also call themselves Communist. So I recommend against it, especially if we ever form a North American-wide federation.

"Social anarchism" is commonly used among anarchists to distinguish ourselves from individualists and "libertarian" supporters of capitalism. I prefer the term "socialist-anarchist." Malatesta agreed, "We…have always called ourselves socialist-anarchists" (p. 143). Socialist is a vaguer term than communist. To some it indicates reformism , due to its being used widely by the social democrats ("democratic socialists") as well as by the Communists. But at least it does not imply totalitarian mass murder, which is the real problem. The Trotskyists called themselves "revolutionary socialists" to distinguish themselves from the Stalinists, and non-Trotskyists have also used the revolutionary socialist label. For generations, "libertarian socialist" has also been used to mean anarchist.

My preference for "socialist-anarchist" and "libertarian socialist" over "anarchist-communist" is my personal opinion, which may be a minority view among U.S. anarchist-communists. In any case, it is not a matter of principle. It is not the label but the content which matters most.

The mainstream of historical anarchism has been anarchist-communism. We can, and, I think, should, identify with the communist tradition in anarchism, which goes from Bakunin (as a goal) to Kropotkin (as a label) to Malatesta, Goldman, and almost all anarchists of their time. There have been factional conflicts between those anarchists who called themselves anarchist-communists and those who called themselves anarchist-syndicalists, but they did not have differences of principle. The anarchist-communists were afraid that the anarchist-syndicalists would dissolve themselves into the union movement ("syndicalism"); the anarchist-syndicalists were afraid that the communists would downplay the central power and importance of the organized workers. However, the anarchist-communists mostly agreed on the need for working class self-organization, particularly on the need for unions, while the anarchist-syndicalists shared the libertarian communist goal.

Our modern agreement with the historical goal of working class anarchist-communism should certainly be stated in our documents and programs. But should it be more prominently stated, in our leaflets and in the names of our organizations?

My answer is: It depends. In some countries, communism has a positive connotation among most militant workers. This is mainly due to the historical self-sacrifice and struggle of the rank-and-file of the Communist Parties, whatever their weaknesses. Apparently this is the case, for example, in South Africa, where our co-thinkers formed the Zabalaza Anarchist Communist Front.

But in other countries, communism has a very negative connotation. This is not just due to negative bourgeois propaganda, but also to 75 years of its identification with the totalitarian reality of the Soviet UnionWha. This regime called itself Communist, as did its puppets and imitators in Eastern Europe, China, etc. In other countries, the Communists were well known for their slavish adoration of the USSR, for their heavy-handed

Part I: The contradictory meanings of Communism

There was a vision, called "communism," which was held by Kropotkin and other anarchist-communists in the 19th and early 20th century. Marx and Engels shared essentially the same goal. In the stateless, classless, society of communism, the means of production would be held in common (by the community), work would be carried out due to social motives rather than for wages, and consumer goods would be available to all according to their needs.

But during the Cold War, "communism" came to mean something entirely different. Great nations were ruled by self-named Communist Parties. Their economies were managed by totalitarian states, their powerless workers produced commodities sold on the internal and international market, and they worked for wages (that is, they sold their labor power as commodities to their bosses).

In that era, "Communists" were mostly people who supported those types of state-capitalist tyrannies. They included pro-Moscow Communist Parties, Maoists, other Stalinists, and most Trotskyists. They called themselves "Communists," and so did most of their opponents. On the other hand, "anti-Communists" were not simply those who opposed such regimes but those who supported Western imperialism — a group ranging from liberals to deranged fascists. At the same time, the pro-Moscow types denounced libertarian socialists as "anti-Communist" as well as "anti-Soviet." Some people took to calling themselves "anti-anti-Communists," as a way of saying that they did not endorse the Communists but were against the McCarthyite witchhunt.

Now we are in a new period. The Soviet Union has collapsed, with its ruling Communist Party. True, such states still exist, with modifications, in China, Cuba, and elsewhere. Unfortunately, they inspire many people. But overall, the number and weight of Communist Parties have diminished.. In contrast, there has been an upswing in the number of people who identify with anarchism, with its mainstream in the anarchist-

a contradiction in terms! The majority of one region may decide to live under anarchist communism, but a neighboring region may decide for parecon ("participatory economics"). So long as workers are not exploited, the anarchist-communists will not start a civil war inside the revolution. In an experimental way, different approaches may be tried out in different regions and we will learn from each other.

Malatesta wrote (1984), "Imposed communism would be the most detestable tyranny that the human mind could conceive. And free and voluntary communism is ironical if one has not the right and the possibility to live in a different regime, collectivist, mutualist, individualist — as one wishes, always on condition that there is no oppression or exploitation of others" (p. 103). He expected some sort of anarchist-communism to win out eventually, but felt that this might take considerable time to achieve everywhere.

Should We Call Ourselves Communists?

With modern technology, anarchist-communism is a practical goal, whether or not we have to pass through various stages or compromises. However, this does not answer the question: Should we call ourselves communists? We are, after all, opponents of every (big-c) Communist state that exists or has existed, and of every Communist Party. Yet we cannot call ourselves anti-communists, since this usually means endorsement of Western imperialism, its (at most) limited democracy, and its rule by a minority class. We are opposed to this class' rule, far more fiercely than have been the Communist Parties. But we endorse the goals of Kropotkin and Karl Marx, of a classless, stateless, society organized by the principle, "From each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs." In this sense, we are truly authentic communists.

necessary to create a world of plenty for all, with leisure for all, in balance with the natural world, but it will require much work to create this world after a revolution.

Phases of Communism

It is for such reasons that libertarian communists have often presented the change to a fully communist society as taking place over time, being phased-in after the revolution. Marx proposed a higher and lower phase of communism. Bakunin implied the same. Even Kropotkin (as Anarcho has pointed out in last month's discussion) suggested a sort of phasing-in of full communism. Immediately after a revolution, Kropotkin indicated, able-bodied adult working people would be required to work a half day (5 hours) in order to get a decent amount of food, clothing, and shelter. Most goods would still be scarce so they would have to be rationed by the community. Over time, as productivity improved, the economy would develop into full communism. Most goods would be plentiful and people could freely take them off the shelves of community warehouses. Work would be done out of social conscience and a desire to keep active. But this would not be immediately possible.

There is another factor. A revolution is likely to be carried out by a united front of anti-capitalist political groupings. For example, North America or Europe is so large and complex that no one revolutionary organization will have all the best ideas and all the best militants. They will have to work together. But some will be anarchist-communists while others will not. Leaving aside out-and-out authoritarian statists, we are likely to be in coalition with pareconists, noncommunist anarchists, revolutionary-democratic socialists, various types of Greens, and so on. We cannot force all these people to live under anarchist-communism. Compulsory libertarian communism is

communist tradition. Other people remain impressed by Marx, but look to libertarian and humanistic interpretations of his work. How then shall we use the term "communism" today? Is its meaning the same as in earlier periods? I will review the history of the term and of its meanings.

While calling themselves "socialists," the founders of the anarchist movement, Proudhon and Bakunin, denounced "communism." A typical statement by Proudhon is that communism is a *"dictatorial, authoritarian, doctrinaire system [which] starts from the axiom that the individual is subordinate…to the collectivity; the citizen belongs to the State …"* (quoted in Buber, 1958; pp. 30–31). Bakunin wrote, *"I detest communism because it is the negation of liberty…I am not a communist because communism… necessarily ends with the concentration of property in the hands of the state"* (quoted in Leier, 2006; p. 191). Proudhon called himself a "mutualist;" Bakunin, a "collectivist."

If we think of a monastery, or of an army (where the soldiers are all given their food, clothing, and shelter), it is easy to see how "communism" (of a sort) can be imagined as inconsistent with democracy, freedom, and equality. In his early writings, Marx denounced the program of "crude communism" in which *"the community is only a community of work and of equality of wages paid out by…the community as universal capitalist"* (Marx, 1961; pp. 125–126). However, Marx and Engels did call themselves communists, a term they preferred to the vaguer "socialist," although they used this also. (They especially disliked the term "social democratic," used by the German Marxists.)

Marx's concept of communism is most clearly explained in his "Critique of the Gotha Program." Communism would be *"the cooperative society based on common ownership of the means of production…"* (Marx, 1974; p. 345). In *"the first phase of communist society,"* (p. 347) there will remain scarcity and the need for labor. "We are dealing here with a communist society…as it emerges from capitalist society…still stamped with

the birthmarks of the old society…" (p. 346). In this lower phase of communism, Marx speculated, individuals would get certificates stating how much labor they had contributed (minus an amount taken for the common fund). Using their certificates, they can take means of consumption which used up the same amount of labor; this is not money because it cannot be accumulated. However, it is still a system of bourgeois rights and equality, in which equal units of labor are exchanged. Given that people have unequal abilities and unequal needs, this equality still results in a certain degree of inequality.

Marx trumpeted, *"In a more advanced stage of communist society, when the enslaving subjugation of individuals to the division of labor, and thereby the antithesis between intellectual and physical labor, have disappeared; when labor is no longer just a means of keeping alive but has itself become a vital need; when the all-around development of individuals has also increased their productive powers and all the springs of cooperative wealth flow more abundantly — only then can society wholly cross the narrow horizon of bourgeois right and inscribe on its banner: From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs!"* (p. 347)

(For reasons known only to himself, Lenin re-labeled Marx's "first phase of communist society" as socialism, and the "more advanced stage of communist society" as communism. Most of the left has followed this confusing usage.)

Despite his rejection of the term communism, Bakunin also advocated a two-phase development of the post-revolution economy, according to his close friend James Guillame. Guillame wrote an essay in 1874, summarizing Bakunin's views. "We should…be guided by the principle, From each according to his ability, to each according to his need. When, thanks to the progress of scientific industry and agriculture, production comes to outstrip consumption, and this will be attained some years after the Revolution, it will no longer be necessary to stingily dole out each worker's share of goods. Everyone will

revolution, the workers would begin to totally overhaul industrial technology, to make it ecologically sustainable and to do away with the split between order-givers and order-takers. We would create a new technology which is "productive" in encouraging human creativity and ecological harmony.

The Need for Increased World Production

Also, while North America, western Europe, Japan, and a few other places, have much modern technology, this is not true of most of the world. The so-called Third World is underindustrialized or unevenly industrialized right now. These impoverished and exploited countries do not have the wealth or industry necessary to go even to the lower phase of communism (called by Lenin the phase of socialism), let alone achieve full communism. The workers and peasants are able to take power in their countries, establishing a system of workers' councils and popular assemblies. However, to solidify their path to communism they would have to spark revolutions in the industrialized, imperialist, nations, in order to get aid.

I disagree with some council communists and other Marxists who claim that the oppressed nations can only make bourgeois revolutions; on the contrary, the workers and peasants of these nations can overthrow the national bourgeoisie and then spread the revolution to the industrialized countries, which will help them in developing toward communism. This view is opposed to Stalin's concept of Building Socialism in One Country. A great deal of help from the industrialized parts of the planet will be needed to develop Africa, Asia, and Latin America, in a humane, democratic, and ecologically balanced fashion.

Therefore to say that there exists all the technological preconditions for full communism is certainly true, but true only in potential. Humanity has the technical knowledge and skills

We have the industrial potential for full communism, but there remain difficulties such as the need to reorganize technology and to appropriately industrialize the "Third World." This raises the need for some sort of phasing-in of communism.

In the century since Kropotkin and Marx wrote about communism, there has been an enormous increase in productivity. For millennia, 95 to 98 % of humanity had to be involved in producing food. Today the ratios are reversed; in the United States, only 2 or 3 % work in agriculture. Similarly, with automated factories, it has been argued, we could produce enough for a comfortable life for everyone. More people would volunteer for work than there would be necessary jobs. An industrialized and cooperative, democratically-planned, economy could provide plenty of leisure for everyone. This is essential for any society based on democracy-from-the-bottom-up. In all previous revolutions, once the upheavals were over, the masses went back to their daily grind while only a few had the time available to actually run things. With leisure for all, then all would be free to self-manage their communes, worksites, and society as a whole.

In short, there exists all the technological preconditions for full, libertarian, communism, what Marx called the "higher phase of communism." Therefore, some have argued that it is possible to go immediately to full communism, once the social and political conditions were met. However, I do not think that this is true.

For one thing, the productive technology which we have is a technology created by capitalism for capitalism. It is "productive" only in terms of achieving capitalist goals, that is, of accumulating capital. In other terms, it is enormously wasteful and destructive, polluting the environment, wiping out natural species, using up nonrenewable resources, stockpiling nuclear bombs, and causing global warming. In human terms, it was consciously developed to hold down the workers, to keep us from thinking, and to maintain social hierarchies. After a

draw what he needs from the abundant social reserve of commodities…In the meantime, each community will decide for itself during the transition period the method they deem best for the distribution of the products of associated labor." (in Bakunin, 1980; p. 361–362) He mentions various alternate systems of remuneration for the transitional period; "…systems will be experimented with to see how they work out" (p. 361).

Today's proposals for Parecon ("participatory economics"), in which workers are rewarded for the intensity and duration of their labor in a cooperative economy, would fit into Bakunin's or Marx's concept of a transitory, beginning, phase, of a free society. But unlike the Pareconists, Marx and Bakunin recognized that this was still limited. For both Marx and Bakunin, then, full communism requires a very high level of productivity and potential prosperity, a post-scarcity economy, when there is plenty of leisure time for people to participate in decision-making, at work and in the community, ending the distinction between order-givers and order-takers. However, neither Marx nor Bakunin described a social mechanism for moving from one phase to the other.

Kropotkin rejected the two-phase approach of the Marxists and the anarchist-collectivists. Instead he proposed that a revolutionary society should *"transform itself immediately into a communist society,"* (1975; p. 98), that is, should go immediately into what Marx had regarded as the "more advanced," completed, phase of communism. Kropotkin and those who agreed with him called themselves "anarchist-communists" (or "communist anarchists"), although they continued to regard themselves as a part of the broader socialist movement.

It was not possible, Kropotkin argued, to organize an economy partially on capitalist principles and partly on communist principles. To award producers differentially by how much training they have had, or even by how hard they work, would recreate class divisions and the need for a state to oversee everything. Nor is it really possible to decide how much individu-

als have contributed to a complex, cooperative, system of production, in order to reward them according to their labor.

Instead, Kropotkin proposed that a large city, during a revolution, *"could organize itself on the lines of free communism; the city guaranteeing to every inhabitant dwelling, food, and clothing…in exchange for…five hour's work; and…all those things which would be considered as luxuries might be obtained by everyone if he joins for the other half of the day all sorts of free associations…"* (p.p. 118–119) This would require the integration of agricultural with industrial work, and physical with mental labor. There remained an element of coercion in Kropotkin's proposal. Presumably able-bodied adults who would not contribute five hours of work would not get the "guaranteed" minimum.

Anarchist-communism came to predominate among anarchists, so that it became rare to find an anarchist (except for the individualist anarchists) who did not accept communism, whatever other disagreements they may have had among themselves. Meanwhile the Marxists had long been calling themselves social-democrats. When World War I broke out, the main social democratic parties endorsed their capitalists' war. Lenin called on the revolutionary wing of international social democracy to split from the traitors to socialism. As part of this, he advocated that his Bolshevik Party and similar parties call themselves Communist Parties, going back to Marx. Some of his followers complained that this would confuse the workers, making the Bolsheviks sound like the anarchist-communists. Lenin declared that it was more important to not be confused with the reformist social democrats. Lenin got his way (as he usually did in his party). The term "communist" had been taken back by the Marxists. With the example of the Russian revolution, most revolutionary-minded people turned to the Leninists; the anarchists became increasingly marginalized. The term "communist" became mostly the label for Leninists.

Part II: It is Not the Label but the Content Which Matters