

Red & Black notes No. 11 Spring 2000 III

Five Theses on Anarchism and Communism

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Introduction

Recently I have come to think of myself in terms of being merely 'communist.' This change does not mean, in any sense, that I have rejected an anti-state / anti-authoritarian / libertarian perspective. What it means is that I have come to feel uncomfortable with the term 'anarchist' because my point of view can not be entirely contained within, or delineated by, the various traditions of anarchism, including the 'anarchist-communist' one.

1. I feel the 'anarchist tradition' has had a tendency to engage in 'power reductionism,' just as the 'Marxist tradition' has had a tendency to engage in 'economic reductionism.' The trouble with this approach is that, in both Marxism and anarchism, such reductionism has had a tendency to limit the ability to make an analysis of the whole problem we face; it tends to create a situation wherein the culprit is sought in only one area of the whole problem.
2. Historically, we can say from our current point of view, this approach has turned out to be advantageous in that, generally speaking, they have analysed the two major seemingly distinct sides of the capitalist system: on one side there is a movement of people analyzing power structures, the state, etc.; on the other side there is a movement of people analyzing economic structures, the class system, etc. These two sides have often overlapped (i.e. class struggle anarchists and council communists), but they have also often stood bitterly opposed for various reasons, some well founded some not. However, we are now facing, as Marx basically predicted, the globalization of capital, and thus it is high time a truly communist perspective emerged, utilising both sides of the analysis, bringing them up to date, and making them a starting point for the development of a multi-faceted and open-ended analysis of the whole. I feel that only through such a unification is a truly revolutionary theoretical behaviour possible.
3. In most of the world, however, we face a serious problem in using the word 'communist.' Due in part to the propaganda of the ruling class, based on Leninist deviations, this word has become synonymous with state-controlled capitalism, and the totalitarian tendencies and structures therein. Thus, people have thought of several adjectives to use to modify the term, so that it takes on its true character: "anti-state", "libertarian", "anarchist", "free", "autonomist", etc. This hyphenation is good for shorthand when there isn't the time to explain that one is "not that kind of communist", or that "what people normally call communism isn't really communism in any way, shape or form."
4. There is no such thing as 'authoritarian communism', nor an 'authoritarian communist.' As the root of the word communism suggests, communism must have at its heart communal activity. In other words activity, free from the constraints of authoritarianism, in which each person is involved directly and equally. Thus, 'authoritarian communists' (Leninists, Trotskyists, Stalinists, Maoists, Bolsheviks, etc.) are not communists at all. Their ideas, based as they are in the capitalist social relation of hierarchies, which culminate in the state, have only reproduced in the former Soviet Union, China, etc., capitalism in a state-controlled form.
5. Communism, due to its anti-authoritarian nature, means the destruction of the state. Even Marx, from whom Leninists and others claim to take their cue, knew this fact. Thus it is unnecessary to modify the word communism with such adjectives as anarchist, libertarian, anti-state, free, autonomist, etc. Communism includes all of these when understood in its true meaning. Unfortunately, we face a situation in which the deliberate obscuring of the term by the ruling classes and their various states, based in the deviations perpetuated by Leninists and others, forces us to use these redundant words to emphasize what we stand for. Thus it is really important as part of theoretical and propaganda work to undermine the ruling class/Leninist misuse of the word and re-appropriate 'communism' for its proper use. However, among us are people who identify as anarchist, libertarian Marxist, council communist, just communist, or none of these terms. But we are, and must be, united by (as far as we understand it at this point) a truly communist (anti-)politics.

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