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Communism and Cooperation

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At first sight, these two concepts are mutually exclusive. Indeed, if by communism we understand the theory and especially the Russian practice of state communism, there is nothing more contradictory than state communism and co-operation.

The latter is based entirely on the right of small, though united, but still private property, whereas state communism denies all property except that of the state; it extends this denial also to the labour property of the small producer — the peasant (taking away the so-called “surplus”) and, moreover, even to the very personal labour of the whole people (universal *compulsory* labour conscription).

But if we penetrate into the essence of communism, expressed in the generally accepted classical formula given by Louis Blanc: “from each according to their ability, to each according to their needs”, we will see that communism in essence coincides with the concept of mutual aid and thus comes close to one of the forms of co-operation — *mutual insurance*.

Co-operation carries out consciously, *scientifically and organised*, what has been practised in the evolution of mankind more or less casually by instinctive ethical impulses.

What does mutual insurance really mean? Its meaning is that as long as you are able to work, you contribute a share of the products of your labour to the “common pot”, a part of your earnings to the common treasury, from which those who are unable to work are provided. When the same fate befalls you, whether from an unfortunate coincidence or from old age, you will be provided for in the same manner. You will not be asked how much you contributed to the general treasury; it is enough that you did so while you had the opportunity and *ability* to endow you according to your *needs*, in the stipulated equal measure with others.

Whereas state communism promises everything to everybody, but in practice only hinders the creative endeavour of the individual and thereby lowers both the productivity of labour and the general level of welfare, mutual insurance, coming from the free individual, promotes the accumulation of public wealth and thereby raises the average level of welfare of the workers and their security.

State communism is not feasible in an *international* form and is incompatible with federalism because it tends towards economic centralisation of production not only on a national but also on a world scale. State communism is imperialist in its essence.

Co-operative communism, mutual insurance, on the contrary, does not tie its destiny to territorial boundaries. Emerging everywhere, it weaves itself into a network of free unions on true federative principles, unites across state borders and is able to penetrate peacefully into the life of even backward peoples, whereas state communism actually excludes the latter from its sphere of influence, establishing “friendly” relations with the government of such Asiatic despots as the Afghan emirs.

True international federative communism is realised by anarchist co-operation, not state socialism.