

# **I've an Idea**

Anarchist Communist Federation

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Have you ever tried to convince someone of the need to abolish property and replace it with communal goods and being told, "The right to personal property is established when an individual combines their labour with natural resources imbuing the product with the inherent property in themselves as argued in Locke's second treatise on government."? If it's not very often and you're more used to "it's a nice idea but it'll never work in practice" you may well wonder at the effectiveness of rational arguments for anarchism in the face of the apparent apathetic and apolitical nature of our class.

Obviously in times of increased struggle people are more responsive to our ideas but there has never yet been a revolutionary situation where most of the working class have taken on anarchist communist ideas to which we attribute a large part of their failure. In short if all the resources of capitalism in power for hundreds of years in this country cannot get its citizens to believe or even understand it's political theory what hope have we of convincing the working class of libertarian ideas, and if only a minority of people are able or willing to understand a comprehensive political viewpoint then a society of political equality is unworkable.

In response to this problem I will offer a theory of the nature of political commitment and its place in human consciousness and then consider what help this can be to the movement and what dangers it may bring.

Having put it off for the first paragraph, the dread word Ideology now rears its ugly cliché. To ensure some clarity I will try to explain what is meant by it in the context of this article. Firstly there is a distinction to be made between an ideology and ideology as a whole. An ideology can be considered as a body of political thought that forms a holistic view of how society should be organised. This is fairly controversial, the problem comes with ideology as a concept. Here opinions differ between its detractors like Engels who characterised it as a false consciousness, or of Karl Popper who portrays it as the abandonment of common sense for abstract doctrine. The view of ideology taken here is that any useful description must be free of a value judgement of ideology itself or it becomes the argument of a particular ideology. This is not to say that you can adopt a superior overview but that different types of analysis must be dealt with on their own level. Consider this as a thesis.

## **Sharing the Concept**

Ideology is a name for the way the mind gives political meaning to language and sense data it receives and expresses. All intelligent being have this process like it or not because it is essential to operating in society. A piece of property does not exist in a physical sense, only in it's mutual recognition by people sharing the concept of property. Ideology is a collection of concepts which people share in common. Although it exists in individual minds ideology can only exist where they are in contact with one another or retain the memory of contact and while it is created by the material universe it cannot be directly extrapolated from knowledge of the physical world as it is itself part of the observing process (as in Heisenburg's uncertainty principle).

Ideology is thus based on acceptance of truths about the political world (not facts) so that people holding different ideologies can observe the same thing but understand different things by it (the concept of the duck/rabbit where two concepts can be seen but only one from any particular ideological viewpoint, we see an expletive boss but the capitalist sees an entrepreneur). Many factors, material and mental affect the success of Ideologies but since they cannot be proved

false, the divine right of kings is still as valid logically now as in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, in so far as people accept them. You can choose to try and understand the ideology you have but you cannot consciously choose your ideology in a rational way as you can your political actions. Try choosing what your favourite food is, let alone your politics. Ideology is your political belief and your actions derive from it.

If that is boring wait for this. We must now ask where ideology fits into the map of human knowledge. Take the lack of successful libertarian revolution. Economics can tell us how far the “forces of production have developed”, psychology can explain the workings of the human mind in their social context, history can tell us the balance of forces in struggle, even astrology can say the stars were in the wrong alignment, all ideology can do is say society is unchanged because it has not adopted a different ideology. It is in fact tautological. Here we see the level ideology acts on, it takes arguments from analytical methods and gives them a political context and meaning – when are the economic conditions ripe for revolution? When it suits our cause to say they are is the reply. Ideology is the motivation force that changes understanding of the world into changing it as an interface between theoretical values and metaphysical comprehension.

## **False Consciousness**

You will have noted by now that this view of ideology is as much a product of ideological view as the views rejected earlier for their positive angle towards their own particular ideology. Marxism isn't false consciousness because it's true, liberalism isn't ideological its living in the real world etc. This is true in so far as any theory of human activity is influenced by the inquirer's political standpoint and in this case the analysis is forwarded for the particular advantage to one in particular (guess which?). This does not invalidate it, or for that matter a Marxist analysis of scientific socialism being coincidentally correct but only discovered by people who just happened to be communists. The difference is in being conscious of the two levels of arguments and avoiding projecting fact onto convictions or making your convictions into facts. The theory of Ideology advocated in this article can have benefits for the movement because it does not elevate our ideology to a only possible correct theory. It places responsibility on the movement to achieve anarchism not wait for it to fall into our lap. It shows that all people are capable of holding complex political theories. Its just a question of understanding what you already subconsciously know (people operate with a much more intricate system of property than Locke expounded) and in a future anarchist society we won't need to read Kropotkin and Malatesta before going out of the house in the morning. It also reduces the possibility of scientific changes ridiculing our values based on attacks of our analysis. There are also dangers principally of making all value relative so that anarchist communism is no better than any other system. This must be fought out in the arena of competing ideologies, and the constant danger of any idea being recuperated to the benefit of the present system. One last point is that while concentrating on ideas here it should never be forgotten that ideas do not spring from thin air. Our ideology (and indeed all others) came from a contestation with the very physical forces of our opponents.

To conclude we now have a very powerful method to bore to death those unwilling to join the movement but if that does not work anarchism, as the self actualisation of our class, may benefit as much from encouraging people to examine their own ideology as a straightforward dissemination of anarchist propaganda.

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