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Concepts of libertarian communism

Isaac Puente

1936

DEFINITION – Libertarian Communism is a form of social organization in which the government of men is replaced by the collective administration of things. Although this definition is very clear, it requires explanations. It is about finding the bases of social coexistence that guarantee the fundamental rights of man: the right to the satisfaction of his needs, and the right to self-determination, that is, the right to life and liberty. Both rights are the basis of well-being, since we cannot conceive of the hungry as free or the slave as satisfied. More specifically: Communism implies, better than the community of property, the existence of a community that primarily attends to managing the economy in such a way that the needs of all its members are satisfied. And for this Communism to be libertarian, it must not contain an accumulation of force or authority that entails a threat to individual freedom.

We know that the present organization, that is, the State and private property, must be destroyed, and that only that which can be replaced with advantage is destroyed.

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More important than the accuracy of the definition is the elaboration of concepts on various detailed questions that its implementation raises, on which there is room for more diversity of opinions.

Although it is true that experimentation will ultimately decide on the best solutions, it is necessary to analyze these and decide in advance on a certain one.

STRUCTURE — We conceive the new structure as a federation of autonomous collectivities. The simpler and more elementary these basic collectivities are, the simpler and easier the problems will be to solve and the more accessible they will be to the aspirations and interests of the individuals who compose them.

Although the National Confederation of Labor has an identical structure that could serve as a model for the whole society, not everyone agrees that libertarian Communism should have a trade union structure, believing, on the contrary, that it should give way to different forms of organisation. The Trade Union is, in essence, a production entity, and could also be a distributor; but, alongside it, there can exist other forms of collectivity, with broader interests and a less specialised character, and, therefore, more human. The basis of the organisation must be the entire community, in small rural nuclei, made up of a majority of peasants and some artisans or civil servants. They will constitute free communes or municipalities. In towns with greater diversity and less uniform activities, Trade Unions are necessary, gathered in a local Federation, whose organisation can coexist with more generic groups such as neighbourhood groups or partial or total councils of the town. Far from being incompatible, both forms or nuclei of collective organization, the exclusively economic and the political or public interest, in my opinion they complement each other, and should even coexist; because the very complexity of modern life demands it.

THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE COLLECTIVITY — The instinct of sociability, the need for mutual support and the recognition of the advantages that association brings, are associative impulses alongside the feeling of solidarity, to form collectivities and to federate them among themselves. Anarchism does not admit any other form of coercion on the individual than moral coercion, that is, the withdrawal or contempt towards the unsolidary or the unrepentant vain. But, on the lips of many, a phrase immediately appears that expresses a form of economic coercion and social justice: "He who does not work, does not eat." It is up to the National Congress to express the concept that the Confederation has on this form of coercion.

FORM OF OWNERSHIP — The ownership regime of wealth and the means of production cannot be the subject of discussion. The property system will be administered by the community and made available to those who wish to produce. The elimination of private property and the hoarding of wealth is the essential guarantee of economic freedom. But this intransigence with regard to private property cannot be taken to the extreme of denying it in things for personal use, or in what is the product of the personal activity of the individual. I do not believe that usufructuary property can logically be denied for furniture, clothing and details whose possession does not imply dispossession or injustice. Regarding the ownership of land — "Land for those who work it" —, it is necessary to distinguish between land dedicated to the production of necessities and that used to produce food or plants of individual taste, such as orchards and gardens, or experimental plots, over which usufructuary property must be respected.

TYPES OF WORK — Just as we distinguish between property, we must also distinguish between work. The production of essential goods requires a certain amount of work, which must be distributed among the useful members of the community, establishing a work day, and sometimes even a work shift. Collective work requires compliance with an organization of

the same, and a production discipline. Outside of this work, controlled by the community, there will be voluntary, free production, based on individual initiative.

Can this voluntary and initiative work serve to exempt one from collective management work?

DIRECTED OR FREE PRODUCTION? — The first condition for the success of a new social order is abundance, the overproduction of essential articles. This facilitates distribution and eliminates the most essential cause of discontent.

If the first revolutionary concern is to maintain production at its present level, the second must be to increase it without limits, until achieving a more real abundance than that which motivates the crisis of capitalism.

This is a technical problem but also a problem of organization: of will and of men "capable of carrying a message to Garcia."

FROM EACH ACCORDING TO HIS APTITUDE — This first part of the formula involves a question of coupling arms in productive activities, in which the personal disposition and inclination of those who, having exercised parasitic or antisocial professions, will have to be coupled in the new form of economy, cannot be left aside.

TO EACH ACCORDING TO HIS NEEDS — This formula of the new distributive justice can only be resolved equitably by abundance and by making it possible for each person to take what he needs, as he wishes, as at the public fountain; but it will be necessary to come as close to it as possible by rationing what is scarce.

This is where we must deal with the procedure for replacing money as a sign of accumulated wealth. Consumption by vouchers, used uniformly in the short trials carried out in Spain, is a provisional but deceptive means, for which a better solution must be sought, for which railway or kilometre passes could serve as a module.

EXCHANGES WITHOUT EQUIVALENCE — In the exchange of products between communities, the measure of their value will not intervene, all being equivalent, as far as necessary products are concerned, whatever the effort they require and the utility they provide.

The notion of value is foreign to libertarian economics, so the measure of value, represented by the currency that can well be called "the apple of discord", is not necessary either.

I do not believe I have exhausted all the aspects and particularities of the subject, which will be the subject of deliberation by all the Unions, in order to achieve, from the base to the top, an agreement on the harmony of the different criteria that must be expressed.