

Libertarians vs. “Libertarianists”

Capitalism Disguised as Freedom

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Libertarians vs. “Libertarianists”: Capitalism Disguised as Freedom

In today’s world, few words have been as politically distorted as the concept of “libertarian”. Originally, in the 19th century, it referred to those who, from within revolutionary socialism, fought for a stateless and classless society. But it has since been co-opted by a school of thought that glorifies the market, private property, and inequality as supposed expressions of freedom. This appropriation, promoted in the Anglophone world in the mid-20th century under the label of Libertarianism, has led to a series of conceptual aberrations—the most egregious being so-called anarcho-capitalism.

This oxymoron, which combines two historically and philosophically antagonistic concepts, is not merely a theoretical imposture: it is an ideological operation serving a reactionary agenda. This text seeks to dismantle that imposture from an anarchist perspective, rescuing anarchism’s socialist and collectivist roots and exposing “libertarianists” as de facto allies of neoliberal authoritarianism and the far-right. As anarchists, we reclaim the term “libertarian” in its original sense and assert the need to precisely name those who, under the guise of anti-state radicalism, defend the perpetuation of capitalism: we call them, with conceptual clarity, “libertarianists”.

The Genealogy of Libertarian

The term *libertarian* was first used by Joseph Déjacque in his 1857 article “On the Human Being, Man and Woman” to oppose those who called themselves liberals—heirs of the French and American Revolutions—but were against true individual and social sovereignty. *Libertarian* was born as a synonym for anarchism: a simultaneous rejection of the State and capital, an affirmation of social organization based on voluntary cooperation, mutual aid, and radical equality. This tradition, which begins with Proudhon, Bakunin, Kropotkin, and Malatesta, manifested in many organizational forms throughout the 20th century: from collectivized agricultural federations to self-managed urban communes, from rationalist schools to antifascist brigades.

Anarchism has never been a doctrine of the abstract individual separated from the community. Its commitment has always been to concrete freedom, embodied in social relations freed from command, exploitation, and alienation. Thus, it is a deeply anti-capitalist current. For anarchists, capital and the state are two sides of the same coin: hierarchical structures that deny popular autonomy.

From Ludwig von Mises to Murray Rothbard

In contrast to this emancipatory tradition, the “Libertarianism” that emerged in the United States in the mid-20th century appropriated the rhetoric of freedom to legitimize a system based on capital accumulation. Authors such as Ludwig von Mises, Hans Hermann Hoppe, and especially Murray Rothbard developed a worldview where freedom equates to unlimited private property and the market is elevated as the supreme mechanism of social organization.

It is worth pausing on a revealing statement by Rothbard himself, a central figure of anarcho-capitalism, who wrote in his 1954 text “Are Libertarians ‘Anarchists’?”:

“We must therefore turn to history to clarify; we find that none of the proclaimed anarchist groups corresponds to the libertarian position, that even the best of them have unrealistic and socialist elements in their doctrines. Moreover, we find that all current anarchists are irrational collectivists, and therefore at the opposite pole of our position. We must therefore conclude that we are not anarchists, and those who call us anarchists lack firm etymological grounds and are entirely ahistorical.”

This is no innocent confusion but a deliberate maneuver of terminological reappropriation. Rothbard not only distances himself from historical anarchism—he disdains and denies it as a legitimate reference for his ideology, which draws not on Bakunin or Kropotkin but on the most radicalized Manchester capitalism.

The Oxymoron of Anarcho-Capitalism

So-called anarcho-capitalism represents the most extreme attempt at this appropriation. It seeks to merge anarchism with capitalism—two absolutely incompatible notions. Anarchism aims to abolish all forms of hierarchical authority, while capitalism is, by definition, a system based on the authority of the owner over those who lack the means of production.

For anarcho-capitalists—or more accurately, libertarianists—freedom is reduced to the ability to sign private contracts between individuals. But this notion of contractual voluntarism is a fiction, as not all individuals have equal power or negotiating conditions. As anarchist theory notes, economic relationships under capitalism are mediated by the structural coercion of necessity: work or die.

Anarcho-capitalism does not eliminate domination—it privatizes it. It replaces state authority with capitalist authority. Instead of public police, it proposes private armies; instead of state justice, arbitration between property owners. There is no emancipation here—only market feudalism.

Reactionism and the Market Go Hand in Hand

Contemporary libertarianism, in focusing on the defense of property and radical individualism, becomes an ideal platform for the rise of reactionary projects. It’s no coincidence that many libertarians have allied with Trumpism in the U.S., Bolsonaroism in Brazil, or Mileism in Argentina. Javier Milei, an ultraliberal economist turned president, identifies as both libertarianist and admirer of Rothbard, Mises, and the Austrian School of Economics. In his discourse, market worship coexists with open disdain for unions, social movements, feminism, and social justice.

In the name of “economic freedom,” all forms of popular organization are attacked, social movements criminalized, and structural oppression denied. Any struggle that questions market supremacy is repudiated. In practice, anarcho-capitalism is an ideology of war against the poor.

Libertarian Organization as Collective Construction

Against this perverse caricature of freedom, anarchism asserts bottom-up organization, the building of popular power, and direct democracy. It is not about individual atomization but about

the affirmation of horizontal collective structures built from the ground up. From housing cooperatives to neighborhood solidarity networks, from autonomous unions to self-managed educational spaces, anarchism unfolds a concrete, living, material social practice.

As Bakunin stated: “The freedom of one can only be realized in the freedom of all.” The freedom of one individual is not limited by another’s, but individual freedoms are properly complemented under a common freedom of the whole society. There is no freedom without equality. And there is no equality without questioning private ownership of the means of production. That is why anarchism proposes a socialized, self-managed economy where labor is liberated from the yoke of capital.

Freedom without socialism is privilege and injustice; socialism without freedom is slavery and brutality.

It is not only urgent but essential to clearly distinguish anarchism from its liberal-capitalist distortion. Against the commodification of life, anarchism affirms the dignity of the commons. Against national or corporate authoritarianism: organization and class struggle. Against possessive egoism: revolutionary solidarity.

To be libertarian does not simply mean to be anti-statist: it means being anti-capitalist, anti-patriarchal, and anti-colonial. It implies building power from below, from horizontality and self-management—not from the myth of the property-owning individual who “chooses” under structural coercion.

To our libertarian comrades in Argentina who today face the anti-social policies of the libertarianist Javier Milei, we send all our strength, our militant solidarity and our internationalist commitment. Your struggle is ours too.

Because there is no anarchism without social revolution. And no social revolution without breaking with capital.

—Don Diego de la Vega, militant of Liza

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