

From primitive to libertarian communism

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Communism, to many people, is a dirty word. For much of this century, communism has been associated with Russia, a country which, in fact, has as its social system, not communism or socialism, but a particularly vicious and totalitarian form of State capitalism. Genuine socialists and libertarian communists have had an unenviable task of demonstrating that neither communism nor socialism exists – or has ever existed – in such countries as Russia, Cuba or even Yugoslavia. They have also had to explain that communism, in a primitive form, has indeed existed, as a form of society, for much of Humanity’s existence on this planet, for perhaps two or more million years.

Since the demise of Primitive Communism, and the advent of private – property society, first of Chattel Slavery, then of Feudalism and, lastly, of Capitalism, “pockets” of peasant communism, have persisted up until present times. Small communistic communities have been established, often by bourgeois and petit-bourgeois “intellectuals”, with varying degrees of success. But throughout the centuries, the idea of communism, usually in an utopian or backward – looking form, has been advocated – and sometimes acted upon – by small idealistic sects. It was not until the middle of the last century, however, that individuals and political groups began to advocate communism as a new, advanced, type of society which should, indeed, would, take the place of capitalism; which would be a “higher” form of society; would be in the interest of the whole of the people, and not just a small class as is capitalism and, most importantly, would have to be brought about by the majority of the population – the workers – through a social revolution. Some of the modern advocates of communism, particularly in the earlier decades of the last century, have been dubbed “utopian” communists; others following Marx and Engels, have at least called themselves “scientific” communists and socialists, but have been accused of, in fact, being “authoritarian communists” by their anarchist opponents who, in many instances, began to advocate a form of non-authoritarian socialism or collectivism which, later, emerged as Libertarian Communism.

Briefly, I shall discuss, first, the system of Primitive Communism and then the ideas and theories of Utopian Communism, Authoritarian Communism and, lastly, Libertarian Communism as advocated by the more working-class elements within the so-called Anarchist Movement. Some non-anarchist groups also propagate libertarian communism as their objective. Their ideas are mainly based upon those of Morris.

Primitive communism

Rousseau’s Noble Savage was largely a figment of his own imagination; nevertheless, the popular conception of the primitive male savage beating “his” wife’s brains out with a club is equally false. The savage was neither violent nor competitive.

The basic characteristics of savagery was dependence upon “wild” sources of food supply, with all the disadvantages that this implies. Primitive people often suffered from malnutrition and the fear of starvation. Communities were small. Only at certain periods of the year was food plentiful. Such form of existence, however, gave rise to an embryonic, rudimentary, ethical code. “Private property”, writes Grahame Clark in his ‘From Savagery to Civilisation’, “is limited to such things as weapons, digging sticks, collecting bags and personal trinkets, although in dividing meat, for example, the share of each individual is as a rule socially defined. Communal rights are generally recognised to extend over all the territories required to provide food for the group,

territories within which all the seasonal wanderings are confined, and the limits of which are known to neighbouring groups.” Of primitive communist, savage, society Peter Kropotkin observes: “Within the tribe everything is shared in common; every morsel of food is divided among all present; and if the savage is alone in the woods, he does not begin eating before he has loudly shouted thrice an invitation to any one who may hear his voice to share his meal”. “In short”, continues Kropotkin, “within the tribe the rule of ‘each for all’ is supreme, so long as the separate family has not yet broken up the tribal unity.” (Mutual Aid) The Biblical concept of “mine and shine’ had not yet emerged

Of Primitive Communism, Paul Lafargue in his ‘Evolution of Property from Savagery to Civilisation’ comments:

“If the savage is incapable of conceiving the idea of individual possession of objects not incorporated with his person, it is because he has no conception of his individuality as distinct from the consanguine group in which he lives. The savage is envirorened by such perpetual material danger, and compassed round with such constant imaginary terrors, that he cannot exist in a state of isolation; he cannot even form a notion of the possibility of such a thing. To expel a savage from his clan, from his horde, is tantamount to condemning him to death; .. To be divided from his companions, to live alone, seemed a fearful thing to primeval man, accustomed to live in troops ... Hunting and fishing, those primitive modes of production, are practiced jointly, and the produce is shared in common...”

When savages no longer lead a nomadic existence, and begin to build a permanent or semi-permanent dwelling-house, the house is generally not a private one as we understand it. but a common one. In such houses, provisions are held in common. Of a somewhat later period (the lower status of barbarism among some American aborigines), Lewis H. Morgan observes: “The syndasmian family was special and peculiar. Several of them were usually found in one house, forming a communal household, in which the principle of communism in living is practiced”. (Ancient Society). Morgan mentions the Iroquois with whom he lived, in particular. Later, with the emergence of the patriarchal family, households become the possession of single families. Nevertheless, throughout this period, land continues to be held in common.

But, continues Lafargue, “Very gradually did the idea of private property, which is so ingrained in and appears so natural to the philistine, dawn upon the human mind. Humanity underwent a long and painful process of development before arriving at private property in land. Indeed, the earliest distribution of the land was into pastures and territories of chase common to the tribe. The development of agriculture was a determining cause of the parcelling of common lands, often into small strips, sometimes on a permanent but usually on an annual, basis. Lafargue notes that generally “landed property on its first establishment among primitive nations, was allotted to women”. And regarding women within primitive communism, Frederick Engels wrote: “Communist housekeeping, however, means the supremacy of women in the house, just as the exclusive recognition of the female parent owing to the impossibility of recognising the male parent with certainty, means that the women, ie the mothers, are held in high respect. One of the most absurd notions taken over from Eighteenth-century enlightenment is that in the beginning of society woman was the slave of man. Among all savages and all barbarians of the lower and middle stages, and to a certain extent of the upper stage also, the position of women

is not only free, but honourable". (Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State). And Lafargue observes that "Landed property, which was ultimately to constitute for its owner a means of emancipation and of social supremacy was, at its origin, a cause of subjection; the women were condemned to rude labour in the fields, from which they were emancipated only by the introduction of servile labour. Agriculture, which led to private property in land, introduced the servile labour which in the course of centuries has borne the names of slave-labour, bond-labour and wage-labour".

In sum, writes Engels, "At all earlier stages of society production was essentially collective, just as consumption proceeded by direct distribution of the products within larger or smaller communistic communities. This collective production was very limited; but inherent in it was the producers' control over their process of production and their product. They knew what became of their product: they consumed it; it did not leave their hands. And so long as production remains on this basis, it cannot grow above the heads of the producers, nor raise up incorporeal alien powers against them, as in civilisation is always the case."

Thus, in brief, was what has been called Primitive Communism.

Utopian communism

It is, in this short essay, impossible to chronicle all, or even most, of the utopian movements and revolts which included communistic elements and tendencies. Suffice it that we mention one or two. Utopian or backward-looking communist currents can be traced as far back as the great slave revolt of 71 BC. Spartacus is reported as saying: "Whatever we take, we hold in common, and no man shall own anything but his weapons and his clothes. It will be the way it was in the old times". (Spartacus, by Howard Fast).

Class hatred and an utopian form of communism was practiced by many of the early Christians, most of whom were, in the early days of that religion, plebeians or former slaves. The Acts of the Apostles confirmed that "...all had things in common". And in the eleventh homily (sermon) of the Acts, one reads: "Grace was among them, since nobody suffered want, that is since they gave willingly that no one remained poor. For they did not give a part, keeping part for themselves; they gave everything in their possession. They did away with inequality and lived in great abundance... What a man needed was taken from the treasure of the community not from the private property of individuals. Thereby the givers did not become arrogant... All gave all that they have into a common fund..." In his 'Foundations of Christianity', Karl Kautsky comments that in the Gospel of St. John, the communistic life of Jesus and the apostles it taken for granted. Such communism however, was mainly a communism of consumption. The Jewish Essenes also practiced a similar form of communism. Christian communism soon declined and disappeared. "Acceptance of slavery, along with increasing restriction of the community of property to common meals, were not the only limitations the Christian community encountered in its effort to put its communistic tendencies into effect", writes Kautsky. Rich sympathisers joined the Church. Money became more important. Concessions were made; and rich men found that they could enter the Kingdom of Heaven — at a price! In sum says Kautsky, "It was the Christian community, not Christian communism, to which the Roman emperors finally bowed. The

victory of Christianity did not denote the dictatorship of the proletariat, but the dictatorship of the gentlemen who had grown big in their community. The champions and martyrs of the early communities, who had devoted their possessions, their labour, their lives for the salvation of the poor and miserable, had only laid the groundwork for a new kind of subjection and exploitation". Nevertheless, the ideas and ideals of communism did not completely die. Even within the Christian Church.

Communism is occasionally mentioned during what historians have called the Middle Ages. It is sometimes referred to as "agrarian communism"; but as Frank Ridley points out in his 'The Revolutionary Tradition in England', "The communism of the Middle Ages was essentially and necessarily a religious communism: it took the form of religious heresies in both East and West...it was one of the major forces making for social revolution throughout the entire mediaeval era. Its untiring propagandists were the underground religious heresies, from that little-known subterranean world which was always smouldering beneath the surface of mediaeval society." This communism was, of course, from the nature of the times, an agrarian communism of consumption, and not an industrial communism of production as in modern times. It was also a religious, and as such, a backward-looking communism. What else could it have been? For that matter, all communism and every revolution that had communism for its aim prior to the Industrial Revolution, looked to the past for its models. Of particular interest, however, is the communism of John Ball and the peasants who took part in the great revolt of 1381.

This is not the place to go into the causes of the revolt. They include the Hundred Years War, the shortage of peasant labour due to the Black Death, the terrible miseries of many of the peasants and the religious-agrarian communist propaganda of the Lollards.

Prior to the great revolt, a hedge-priest, whose 'base' was in Colchester, by the name of John Ball, roamed the countryside, speaking to people wherever they gathered. Ball was probably the world's first communist "agitator". His text was a little jingle: "When Adam delved and Eve span, Who was then the gentleman?". After his release from Rochester prison, Ball spoke to an enormous audience of peasants on Blackheath, on June 12th 1381. His exact speech is not known, but Charles Poulson in his 'English Episode', and William Morris in his 'A Dream of John Ball', both give us a very good idea of what he probably said.

Says Poulson's John Ball:

"...In the beginning all men were equal, all men were brothers. How is it that some can say 'I am nobler than you'? How is it that one man delves day-long in the earth, and with all his labour has not enough to feed his babes, and another takes the life from the poor and makes from it a jewelled mantle for his back?... I say to you that in spite of its fine pride and rich clothing, its white hands and perfumes, Nobility is evil... And in truth it is time to cry enough. I see you here before me, my brothers, and not one of you but has lived his life toiling, from the first sun-up till the last rays fade. And you are clothed in rags. The corn and the cattle grow great in your care, but there is little fat on you. A handful of beans is your pottage. All that you grow, all that you make and build, is taken. This in fines, this in dues, this in labour. The noble master drains your blood like a vampire. Would there not be plenty and happiness but for what is taken? So I say, my brothers, let us feed our children before their lordships. Let us make an end to this thieving."

And, according to William Morris, John Ball spoke thus:

“...too many rich men there are in this realm; and yet if there were but one, there would be one too many, for all should be his thralls... And how shall it be when these (masters) are gone, what else shall ye lack when ye lack masters? Ye shall not lack for fields ye have tilled, nor the houses ye have built, nor the cloth ye have woven; all these shall be yours, and whatso ye will of all that the earth beareth; and he that soweth shall reap, and the reaper shall eat in fellowship... then shall no man mow the deep grass for another..”

On other occasions, John Ball remarked that “things cannot go well in England, nor ever will, until everything shall be in common”. (See ‘A People’s History of England’, by A.L. Morton. Similar views were expressed elsewhere in Europe, particularly among the French Jacquerie about forty years before. In England they became largely dormant for centuries. It is to the “Great Rebellion” — the English Revolution — of the seventeenth century that we must look next for communistic ideas and experiments.

Utopian communist ideas found champions among the Levellers; but, as yet, communism made no appeal among the people of the towns and cities, which did not possess an industrial proletariat. In his *Cromwell and Communism*, Eduard Bernstein remarks: “At the most, communistic proposals might have attracted the rural workers at certain times. In fact, there is no instance during the Great Rebellion of an independent class movement of the town workers, although during the zenith of the movement there were several attempts at agrarian communist risings”.

An associate of John Liburne, by the name of William Walwyn, attacked “the inequality of the distribution of the things of this life”; and claimed, like John Ball before him, that “the world shall never be well until all things be common”. And against objections to communism, he commented: “There would then be less need for Government; for then there would be no thieves, no covetous persons, no deceiving and abuse of one another, and so no need of Government.” William Walwyn would appear to have been Britain’s first anarchist-communist! There were others who advocated somewhat similar ideas, often with quotations from the Bible.

And there were also others who attempted to put their ideas into practice. Among them were the “True Levellers”, as they called themselves; or “diggers”, as their contemporaries dubbed them.

On Sunday, April 8th, 1649, there suddenly appeared near Cobham in Surrey, a group of men, armed with spades, who started to dig up uncultivated land at the side of St. George’s Hill. Their intention was to grow corn and other produce on it. They explained to the local country-folk that their numbers were, as yet, few but would soon increase to 4,000. They proposed that “the common people ought to dig, plow, plant, and dwell upon the Commons without hiring them, or paying any rent”. After they had erected tents, worked the land and prepared to dig on a second hill, also for sowing, (their numbers had increased to about fifty), they were attacked by troops and many were arrested. Winstanley, their leader, was brought before General Fairfax. None of the “diggers” were prepared to defend themselves by force, however. Most were heavily fined. Later, they attempted again to take over common lands, but were again arrested — and fined. They also published pamphlets, some of which were “couched in somewhat mystical phraseology, which”, says Bernstein, “serves as a cloak to conceal the revolutionary designs of the authors”. One such pamphlet argued that “In the beginning of time the Creator Reason made the earth to be common treasury.” They also composed a ‘Digger’s Song’ in a similar vein.

In 1651, Gerrard Winstanley wrote his ‘The Law of Freedom on a platform’ — in which he said:

“Is not buying and selling a righteous law? No, it is the law of the conqueror, but not righteous law of creation: how can that be righteous which is a cheat?... When mankind began to buy and sell, then did he fall from his innocency; for then he began to oppress and cozen one another of their creation birthright.”

He continues that, though Crown and Church lands should be for common use, they were being sold to land-grabbing army officers and speculators of all kinds. He says that there should be neither poor nor rich; that there should be no inequality that the “earth and storehouses be common”; that there should be no buying or selling, and, lastly, no need for any lawyers. Winstanley was not, however, opposed to organisation “All officers in a true Magistrace of the Commonwealth are to be chosen officers. All officers in a Commonwealth are to be chosen new ones every year”. “When publique officers remain long”, he contended, “they degenerate”. Indeed, the “True Levellers” had quite a platform of “articles” and “clauses! Utopians, the Levellers and True Levellers may have been, but at least their ideas and organisation was, indeed, more advanced and practical than some of our own “modern” anarchists! Moreover, far from all the utopian communists of the period were pacifists. Within the Cromwellian army, there were a number of rebellions from 1647 onwards. Unfortunately, the movements of the period seem to have evolved or degenerated into Quakerism, and relative repeatability.

Marxism

The society of the early savage was Primitive Communism. But a few thousand years ago, with the cultivation of the soil and the subsequent production of a surplus, class divisions became apparent. Warfare became organised; a repressive State emerged and prisoners were taken captive. They were, more often than not, made to toil in the fields or build temples and pyramids for their new masters. Hence the slave empires of antiquity. Wealth tended to accumulate in the hands of a few wealthy people. The fall of the last of the slave empires — that of the decadent Roman Empire — marked the dawn of a new era. About a thousand years ago, in what we call Europe and elsewhere, a new form of private property society, and a new form of slavery for the many, gradually emerged. It has been called feudalism. The slave became the serf. His master owned the land, and the serf toiled on his lord’s land, producing wealth for him, and in return he was allowed to work upon tiny strips of land for himself. The wealth he, thus, produced was generally just enough for him to live on. “It had taken several thousands of years of chattel slavery to prepare the way for serfdom. And it took several centuries of feudalism to prepare the way for a new form of society — capitalism — the kernel of which already existed in the feudal society.” (‘Socialist Manifesto’, S.P. of C.).

The wealth and power of the townsmen, or at least a section of them, increased and that of the landowning nobility declined. The nobleman became a complete parasite upon society. Society’s new masters — after many struggles and setbacks, as well as revolutions — became the burghers or, as they were later called, the bourgeoisie. Trade and commerce increased. “Once freed from the fetters of feudalism, the onward march of capitalism became a mad, headlong rush. Everywhere mills, factories, and furnaces sprang up. Their smoke and fumes turned fields once fertile and populous into desolate, uninhabitable wastes; their refuse poisoned and polluted the rivers until they stank to Heaven...” (Socialist Manifesto).

A new condition of slavery replaced serfdom. Socialists, both Marxist and non-Marxist, called, and still call, it “wage-slavery” Former serfs and, quite often, free peasants, were driven from the land and herded into the towns, where they were forced (otherwise they would have starved – and often did!) to work in the mills and mines, and the factories, of their new masters, the bourgeoisie, the owners of capital – the capitalists. The workers created, as did the slaves and serfs, a surplus for their masters, over and above what was needed to keep them more or less in working order. Capitalism, as a society, is based upon wage-labour and capital.

With the development of capitalism, economists and others including social reformers and utopian socialist “intellectuals” began to analyse the new and developing society. A new body of ideas began to emerge as to the nature of capitalism. In the main, from about 1844 onwards, they have been associated with two Germans, who, for many years lived in England, the then most advanced capitalist country. They were Karl Marx and Frederick Engels – though both admitted their debt to earlier economists and philosophers. nevertheless, both Marx and Engels were particularly scathing in their attacks on what they considered to be “unscientific” socialists and communists as well as those whom called themselves “True Socialists”. However, in 1845, Engels was still influenced by utopian communist ideas. In the penultimate paragraph of his *The Condition of the Working-Class in England* in 1844 he asserts that “communism stands, in principle, above the breach between bourgeoisie and proletariat... Communism is a question of humanity and not of the workers alone... And as Communism stands above the strife between bourgeoisie and proletariat it will be easier for the better elements of the bourgeoisie... to unite with it...” But by 1847, when he drafted *Principles of Communism* (that is the first draft of the famous Communist Manifesto by Marx and Engels), Engels begins by saying that “Communism is the doctrine of the conditions of liberation of the proletariat”. Incidentally, Engels in his *Principles of Communism* says that the workers are propertyless and are obliged to sell their labour to the bourgeoisie; later, after Marx had studied the capitalist mode of production, he asserted that the workers did not sell their labour, but their labour-power, their abilities to work.

In 1848, Marx wrote his *German Ideology*, in which he deals with and attacks the idealistic thinkers of Germany and, in the second part of the book, such “True” socialists and utopian communists as Saint-Simon, Fourier and Proudhon. He also attacks Proudhon in his *Poverty of Philosophy*. However, the first great “classic” of “scientific” or what, later on, has been called authoritarian, communism was, of course, the Communist Manifesto. In the main, it has remained so; though Engels writes in his 1872 Preface that parts of the program had “in some details become antiquated”.

The Communist Manifesto begins by asserting that “A spectre is haunting Europe – the spectre of Communism”. The history of all hitherto existing (recorded) society, it proclaims, is the history of class struggles. But our society – capitalism – has simplified class antagonisms. “All society is more or less splitting up into two opposing camps, into two great hostile classes: the bourgeoisie and the proletariat”, says the Manifesto. (I quote from the SLP, that is the De Leonist version, though I have four or five different versions and translations, all more or less the same). Marx and Engels, in the Communist Manifesto (which saw the light of day in 1848) openly break with the utopians and the “True” socialists in advocating that it will be the proletarians – albeit through a Communist Party – who must overthrow bourgeois society. Says the Manifesto “All previous historical movements were the movements of minorities, or in the interests of minorities. The proletarian movement is the conscious movement of the immense majority in the interest of the immense majority”. This is, indeed, worth remembering as many so-called latter-day Marxists

and all Leninists plug the “vanguard party” line. Marx and Engels emphasise that the workers have no country. They are, to all intents and purposes, propertyless. It is worth noting that, in 1848, and more or less throughout their lives, Marx and Engels combine their propaganda for communism with a list of reforms. Like many others, they felt that one could advocate both the abolition of bourgeois society and reforms of that society at one and the same time! The Manifesto, therefore calls for, among other things, a heavy progressive income tax, abolition of inheritance, confiscation of the property of emigrants and rebels, centralisation of credit in the hands of the State, centralisation of the means of transportation in the hands of the State, organisation of industrial armies and free public education. In other words: state-capitalism!

Their vision of communism of the future, is summed up thus:

“When in the course of development class distinctions have disappeared, and all production is concentrated in the hands of associated individuals, the public power will lose its political character. Political power, properly speaking, is the organised power of one class for the purpose of oppressing another. If the proletariat, forced in its struggle against the bourgeoisie to organise as a class, makes itself by a revolution the ruling class, and as the ruling class destroys by force the old conditions of production. It destroys along with these conditions of production the conditions of existence of class antagonism, classes in general, and, therewith, its own domination as a class.

In the place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms, an association appears in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all”.

The Communist Manifesto ends with the now famous: “Workers of all Lands, Unite!”

In his paper addressed to the General Council of the First International (later published as Value, Price and Profit and not Wages, Price and Profit, as has been stated on occasions, particularly in Russia), Marx calls on the working class to abolish the wages system, though as an ultimate, not immediate, aim. This was in 1865. Ten years later, in his ‘Critique of the Gotha Program’, Marx elaborates on what he considers a communist society would be like. Like the ‘Communist Manifesto’, the ‘Critique of the Gotha Program’, is readily available, and should be read by anarchists and libertarian communists. I will, therefore, only quote the main points from the third section. (I use the Workers’ Literature Bureau version, published in Melbourne, Australia, in 1946. The other editions are much the same, whether they be the Russian, De Leonist or Lawrence and Wishart editions).

Says Marx:

“Within the co-operative society, based on the common ownership of the means of production, the producers do not exchange their products... What we are dealing with here is a Communist society, not as it has developed on its own basis, but, on the contrary, as it is just issuing out of capitalist society. Hence a society that still retains, in every respect, economic, moral and intellectual, the birthmarks of the old society from whose womb it is issuing”. Here, Marx argues that the producer gets back exactly as much as he gives; he receives a community cheque showing that he has done so much labour. “Equal right is here, therefore, still according to the principle capitalist right...”. It is still tainted with “a capitalist limitation” It is, therefore, says Marx, “a right of inequality”. Nevertheless he argues, “these shortcomings are unavoidable in the first

phase of Communist society”. But — and here we come to the all important and well-known passage of the ‘Critique of the Gotha Program’ — “In the higher phase of Communist society after the enslaving subordination of the individual under the division of labour has disappeared, and therewith also the opposition between manual and intellectual labour; after labour has become not only a means of life, but also the highest want of life; when the development of all the faculties of the individual, the productive forces have correspondingly increased, and all the springs of social wealth flow more abundantly — only then may the limited horizon of capitalist right be left behind entirely, and society inscribe on its banners ‘From everyone according to his faculties, to everyone according to his needs!’ “.

In Section Two of the ‘Critique’, Marx asks the question: “What then is the change which the institution of the State will undergo in a communist society?”. And his answer is: “Between the capitalist and communist systems of society lies the period of the revolutionary transformation of the one into the other. This corresponds to a political transition period, whose State can be nothing else but the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat”. Nowhere in this stage in Marx’s thinking does he seem to envisage any sort of dying out or ‘withering away’ of the State. For such ideas, we have to look — at a somewhat later date — to Engels.

Engels’ most important works on the subject of communism/ socialism are his ‘Anti-Duhring’, first published in 1878, and his ‘Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State’, first published in 1884. Part of ‘Anti-Duhring’ has appeared as ‘Socialism: Utopian and Scientific’, a work much admired by groups such as the SPGB in this country. In Part Three of ‘Anti-Duhring’, Engels first discusses Robert Owen’s communist theories and colonies as well as the ideas of Saint-Simon and Fourier. Such people, Engels dubs as utopians; but remarks that “The utopians...were utopians because they could be nothing else at a time when capitalist production was as yet so little developed”. After analysing bourgeois society in the same, but somewhat clearer, manner as did Marx, Engels then outlines what has remained the ‘classic’ Marxist method of bringing socialism about.

“The proletariat seizes the State power, and transforms the means of production in the first instant into State property. But in doing this, it puts an end to itself as the proletariat, it puts an end to all class differences and class antagonisms, it puts an end to the State as the State.” And “When ultimately it (the State) becomes really representative of society as a whole, it makes itself superfluous. As soon as there is no longer any class of society to be held in subjection; as soon as — along with class domination and the struggle for individual existence based on the former anarchy (sic!) of production the collisions and excesses arising from these have also been abolished — there is nothing more to be repressed that would take a special repressive force, a State necessary. The first act in which the State really comes forward as the representative of society as a whole — the taking possession of the means of production in the name of society — is at the same time its last independent act as a State. The government of persons is replaced by the administration of things and the direction of the processes of production. The State is not ‘abolished’, it withers away.” In the ‘Socialism: Utopian and Scientific’ version it says: “It dies out”. In his section on production, Engels argues that production must be revolutionised from “top to bottom”; productive labour will become a pleasure, not a burden, production, utilising modern industry, will be on the basis of “one single vast plan”; and there will also be the abolition of the separation between town and country, as well as the old division of labour.

In his ‘Origin of the State’, Engels argues that the proletariat must constitute its own Party and vote for its own representatives to Parliament. “Universal suffrage ‘, he says, “is thus the

gauge of the maturity of the working class. It cannot and never will be anything more; but that is enough". Of the State, he contends that it has not existed from all eternity. Societies have managed without it. The State will inevitably fall. In fact he says, "The society which organises production anew on the basis of free and equal association of the producers will put the whole State machinery where it will then belong — into the museum of antiquities, next to the spinning wheel and the bronze axe".

Before leaving the Marxian view of communism/socialism I think it is worth mentioning that Marx and Engels envisioned a quite authoritarian state of affairs within such a society, at least in the early days. In his essay on Authority, Engels write

"Authority ... means the imposition of the will of another upon ours; on the other hand, authority presupposes subordination. Now, since these two words sound bad and the relationship which they represent is disagreeable to the subordinated party, the question is to ascertain whether there is any way of dispensing with it, whether — given the conditions of present-day society — we could not create another social system, in which this authority would be given no scope any longer and would consequently have to disappear ...

... Everywhere combined action ... displaces independent action by individuals; now, is it possible to have organisation without authority?

Supposing a social revolution dethroned the capitalists, who now exercises authority over the production and circulation of wealth. Supposing, to adopt entirely the view of the anti- authoritarians, that the land and the instruments of labour had, become the collective property of the workers who use them. Will authority have disappeared, or will it only have changed its form?"

Engels then instances a factory, a large cotton mill. He says

"... particular questions arise in each room and at every moment concerning the mode of distribution, production of materials, etc., which must be settled at once at pain of seeing production immediately stopped; whether they are settled by decision of a delegate placed at the head of branch of labour or, if possible, by a majority vote, the will of the single individual will always be subordinate itself, which means that questions are settled in an authoritarian manner".

Engels' conclusions regarding the "delegation of function" are, of course, open to debate; but in fact, he goes much further in his praise of authority. He continues

"But the necessity of authority, and of impervious authority at that, will nowhere be found more evident than on board a ship on the high seas. There, in time of danger, the lives of all depend on the instantaneous and absolute obedience of all to the will of one".

Engels was, of course, wrong then, as he would be now! I have, in fact, dealt with this in an article entitled 'Anarchy in the Navy', in Anarchy 14, instancing the running of much of the Spanish Republican Fleet by rank-and-file sailors during the revolutionary period in 1936.

We will leave Engels to his “impervious authority”; though it may not come amiss to mention here that, surprisingly, even William Morris, who has always been considered something of a libertarian socialist and a quasi-anarchist, also takes a similar line to Engels regarding the running of a ship “in socialist condition”, in his essay, ‘Communism’.

Lastly, I shall briefly turn to the libertarian or anarchist communist viewpoints, which in the last century were mainly associated with two Russians — Michael Bakunin and Peter Kropotkin, though others also espoused similar views.

Libertarian communism

Between 1842 and 1861, Bakunin could best be described as a revolutionary pan-Slavist, though there are indications of libertarian tendencies before 1861. I would say, however, that he could not really be called a libertarian or anarchist before 1866, when he wrote his ‘Revolutionary Catechism’.

In his ‘Catechism’, Bakunin argues that “freedom is the absolute right of every adult man and woman” that “the freedom of each is therefore realisable only in the equality of all”. He asserts the absolute rejection of every authority, “including that which sacrifices freedom for the convenience of the State”; “order in society” he says, “must result from the greatest possible realisation of individual liberty, as well as of liberty on all levels of social organisation”. He calls for the “establishment of a commonwealth”, and the “abolition of classes, ranks and privileges” and, rather surprising, “universal suffrage”, though Max Nettlau says that he did not mean in the State, but in the new society. Bakunin also calls for the abolition of the “all-pervasive, regimented, centralised State”, and the “internal reorganisation of each country on the basis of the absolute freedom of individuals, of the productive associations and of the communes”. Freedom can only be defended by freedom, he says. “The basic unit of all political organisation in each country — must be the completely autonomous commune constituted by the majority vote of all adults of both sexes. No one shall have either the power or the right to interfere in the internal life of the commune...” The nation, continues Bakunin, must be nothing but a federation of autonomous provinces. Without political equality there can, be no real political liberty, but political equality will be possible only when there is social and economic equality. The majority, says Bakunin, live in slavery And “This slavery will last until capitalism is overthrown by the collective action of the workers”. Therefore the land, and all the natural resources, are (to be) the common property of everyone...” He concludes his ‘Catechism’: “The revolution, in short, has this aim: freedom for all, for individuals as well as collective bodies, associations, communes, provinces, regions, and nations, and the mutual guarantee of this freedom by federation”.

Later, also in 1866, Bakunin wrote another Catechism on very much the same lines, in which he again asserts that the land is to be the common property of all, and that “The revolution must be made not for, but by, the people, and can never succeed if it does not enthusiastically involve all the masses of the people; that is, in the rural countryside as well as the cities.”

In his ‘Federalism, Socialism, Anti-Theologism’, Bakunin says that socialism means “to organise society in such a manner that every individual endowed with life, man or woman, may find almost equal means for the development of his various faculties ... to organise a society which, while it makes it impossible for any individual whatsoever to exploit the labour of others, will not allow anyone to share in the enjoyment of social wealth, always produced by labour only, unless

he has himself contributed to its creation with his own labour". He thinks that the complete solution – to the problems thrown up by capitalism – “will no doubt be the work of centuries”. Nevertheless, “history has set the problem before us, and we can no longer evade it if we are not to resign ourselves to total impotence”.

Bakunin, again and again, asserts that the people must make the revolution themselves, that the State must go first: that society must be “organised from the bottom up by revolutionary delegations ...”; that the “revolutionary alliance” of the people must exclude any form of dictatorship. But, at least in 1869, Bakunin argued that a well-organised revolutionary “society” can assist “at the birth of the revolution by spreading among the masses ideas which give expression to their instincts. and to organise, not any army of the revolution – the people alone should always be that army – but a sort of revolutionary general staff, composed of dedicated, energetic, intelligent individuals, sincere friends of the people above all ... capable of serving as intermediaries between the revolutionary idea and the instincts of the people”. There need not, says Bakunin, be a great number of such people. Two or three hundred, he suggests, for the organisation in the largest countries. What our British “traditional” anarchists – who it would seem are not traditionalists, or at least Bakuninists – would say to this idea I fear to think!

Bakunin was particularly critical of those whom he called the “State Communists”. He was also scathing of those whom he considered wished to impose communism or as he sometimes called it, collectivism, on the peasants. These he considered to be Jacobins. Bakunin and Marx were, of course antagonists. This was partly personal and partly political. In his ‘Letter to La Liberte’, Bakunin attacks Marx, saying that the popes had, at least, an excuse for considering that they possessed “absolute truth”; but “Mr. Marx has no such excuse”. In Bakunin’s view, “the policy of the proletariat. necessarily revolutionary, should have the destruction of the State for its immediate goal”. But Bakunin could not understand how Marx and the Marxists wished to preserve, or use the State, as an instrument of emancipation. “State means domination, and any domination presupposes the subjection of the masses and, consequently, their exploitation for the benefit of some ruling minority”, asserts Bakunin against Marx. “The Marxists profess quite contrary ideas,” argues Bakunin. “Between the Marxists and ourselves there is an abyss. They are the governmentalists; we are the anarchists in spite of it all”, he says.

Basically, then, this was the great argument between Bakunin and Marx; it is still the argument between revolutionary anarchists and Marxists; between authoritarian communists and libertarian communists.

(Note: All quotations from Bakunin are taken from ‘Bakunin on Anarchy’, edited by Sam Dolgoff. Much the same material can also be gleaned from ‘Bakunin’, edited by Maximoff.)

Of Bakunin, Peter Kropotkin writes: “Bakunin was at heart a Communist; but, in common with his Federalist comrades of the International, and as a concession to the antagonism that the authoritarian Communists had inspired in France, he described himself as a ‘collectivist anarchist’. But, of course he was not a ‘collectivist’ in the sense of Vidal or Pecqueur, or their modern followers, who simply aim at State Capitalism.” (Modern Science and Anarchism). Nevertheless, as early as 1869, a number of “Bakuninists” described themselves as Communists.

Kropotkin, to a large degree, developed the ideas put forward, often in a rather unscientific, uncoordinated, form, by Bakunin. Before becoming an anarchist, Kropotkin had a scientific

training and background. In his 'Memoirs of a Revolutionist', he sees, as it were, a new form of society germinating within "the civilized nations"; a society that must, one day, take the place of the old one: a society of equals, "who will not be compelled to sell their hands and brains to those who choose to employ them in a haphazard way, who will be able to apply their knowledge and capacities to production, in an organism so constructed as to combine all the efforts for procuring the greatest sum possible of well-being for all, while free scope will be left for every individual initiative". Kropotkin says that such a society will be composed of a multitude of associations, federated for the purposes which require federation – communes of production, communes of, and for, consumption, all kinds of organisations, covering not just one country but many. All of these will combine directly, be means of free agreements between them. "There will be", he says, "full freedom for the development of new forms of production, invention and organisation". People will combine for all sort of work "in common". The tendency towards uniformity and centralisation will be discouraged, remarks Kropotkin. Private ownership and the wages system must go. There will be no need of government; because of the free federation and "free agreement" of organisations, which will take its place. And in his 'Modern Science and Anarchism', Kropotkin particularly attacks the "State Socialists", who under the name of collectivism (we should say nationalisation today), advocated, not communism or socialism, but State Capitalism. This, he says, is nothing new; perhaps just an improved. but still undesirable, form of the wage-system.

Kropotkin, in the same work, refers to "the coming social revolution", which is quite different from that of a Jacobin, dictatorship. And of such a revolution, he remarks: "During a revolution new forms of life will always germinate on the ruin of the old forms, but no government will ever be able to find their expression so long as these forms will not have taken a definite shape during the work of reconstruction itself, which must be going on in a thousand spots at the same time." Such was Kropotkin's federalist – libertarian – communism and socialism.

Since Bakunin and Kropotkin formulated their ideas of free, federalist, anarchist, libertarian, communism, others have, followed and developed them. Malatesta popularised them; and so did Alexander Berkman, particularly in 'What Is Communist Anarchism'. In 1926, Archinov, Makhno, Ida Me and others developed the ideas of libertarian, anarchist communism and organisation in their 'Organisational Platform of the Libertarian Communists'. I will not discuss the views of Malatesta, Berkman and the "Platformists" here as, no doubt many of you are as, if not more, familiar with them as I am. Naturally, the formulation of libertarian communist and socialist ideas, and forms of organisation, will continue, in the words of Kropotkin, "to germinate". Let us hope so!

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Peter Newell
From primitive to libertarian communism
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