

Community-Self-Management and Commoning within 6 Libertarian Socialist Influenced Revolutions

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Introduction:

The notion of lower case c communalism refers to community-self-management, related mutual-aid/commoning, as well opposition against hierarchy through communalized direct action and self-defense. There is a significant history of community-self-management and commoning prior to, alongside, influencing, part of, and influenced by libertarian socialism/communism. The communalist dimension of libertarian socialism is in favor of community assemblies+embedded councils, co-federations thereof, related dialogue/deliberation, direct-democracy (direct-collective-decision making), and mutual aid+direct action to meet needs, solve social problems, and aim towards social transformation along libertarian socialist/communist/communalist lines (Usufruct Collective, 2022). The goal of such social transformation would be a world without rulers, where means of existence and production would be held in common, with fruits thereof distributed according to needs, where communities, co-federations thereof, participants, and other collectives could all self-manage and decide on what they do and are affected by within relations of mutual-freedom and mutual-non-domination.

The following will look at 6 libertarian socialist influenced revolutions: The Morelos Commune, Makhnovshchina, Shinmin, The Spanish Revolution, The Zapatistas, and Rojava. All of these revolutions include development of community assemblies and commons to both organize the reconstruction of the new world as well as opposition against domination, exploitation, and hierarchical society. All of these revolutions were influenced by libertarian socialist theory and practice to varying degrees (although all of these revolutions also have other influences and are composed of many participants beyond ideological homogeneity). The first four of these revolutionary movements existed prior to 1940. The final two revolutions mentioned in this essay appear later on in history and continue onward to this day.

Community-Self-Management and Commoning within 6 Libertarian Socialist Influenced Revolutions:

Morelos Commune:

Within the Mexican Revolution, The Morelos Commune (1912-1918) developed. The Morelos Commune was influenced by local indigenous practices of self-management as well as agrarian socialism, Magonism, and libertarian socialism (Gilly, 1970, Correa, 2021). The movement was based on land reform through agrarian communalism in a way that was “antagonistic...to capitalism and its inherent need for the sanctity of private property” (Wehling, 2020). However, just as the Mexican Liberal Party was an anarchist party, this notion of land reform was expropriation, revolution, and social transformation. There was expropriation and communalization of land with mass support of the population (Gilly, 1970, Wehling, 2020).

“Zapatismo was the movement that, in its Plan de Ayala drafted toward the end of 1911 and in subsequent documents, proposed the most advanced programs for radical redistribution of land and communal organization of government for communities and for the whole Republic, an anti-capitalist program in its content and dynamic. And between 1912 and 1918 it implemented the program and maintained its own government in the region which came to be known as the Morelos Commune,” (Gilly, 2010). The Ayala Plan, a main document of the Morelos Commune, said, “we give notice: that [regarding] the fields, timber, and water which the landlords, científicos, or

bosses have usurped, the pueblos or citizens who have the titles corresponding to those properties will immediately enter into possession of that real estate of which they have been despoiled by the bad faith of our oppressors, maintain at any cost with arms in hand the mentioned possession; and the usurpers who consider themselves with a right to them [those properties] will deduce it before the special tribunals which will be established on the triumph of the revolution,” (Zapata and Montano, 2021).

The Land was distributed to communities and individuals leading to a radically egalitarian communal form of social organization (Gilly, 1970). Neighbors’ assemblies were empowered as a form of local self-government responsible for political, economic, and defensive functions (Gilly, 1970). Quoting the General Law on Municipal Liberties decreed by Zapata, “Municipal liberty is the first and most important of democratic institutions, since nothing is more natural or worthy of respect than the right which citizens of any settlement have of arranging by themselves the affairs of their common life and of resolving as best suits them in the interests and the needs of their locality,” (Wehling, 2020). Its spirit lives on rather concretely in the continuation of community assembly and commoning movements in the region and beyond. The Morelos Commune was defeated primarily by external warfare against it as well as compromises in the face of such external attacks (Gilly, 1970).

Makhnovshchina/Makhnovia:

Another early libertarian socialist influenced revolutionary society was Makhnovshchina in Ukraine (1917-1921). Prior to the revolution, there was already a history of communal organization in Ukraine (Skirba, 2003). Peasants’ unions were formed to seize territory to create free communes (Skirda, 2003). The goal of the Peasants’ Union was to “transform all the land, factories, and workshops into communal property as the basis on which they will build a new life,” (Makhno, 2009). Through struggle, expropriation, and communal defense thereof, “Peasants united in “communes” or “free-work soviets,” and communally tilled the land for which they had fought with the former owners. “These libertarian communes were founded upon the principle of equality and fellowship among all their members...Cooking and dining facilities were shared although any individual could see to his own meals provided proper notice was given. Everyone rose early and set to work right after breakfast. In the event of absenteeism, the commune member would let his neighbor know so that a replacement could be found. The work program was arranged by common consent at general assemblies. Farming was not the sole activity; there was also craft production and even a machine shop,” (Skirda, 2003).

Each person would work according to their abilities and function in various temporary delegate roles and then “returned to their regular work alongside the other members of the communes,” (Guerin, 1970). Decisions about the economy were made at general assemblies of communes and included agreements to share in production and consumption to provide for the needs of people (Skirda, 2003). And even though farming and social reproduction more broadly were the major economic activities, there was also craft production and some machine work as well (Skirda, 2003). “The communes were not created on the basis of example or caprice, but exclusively on the basis of the vital needs of peasants who had possessed nothing before the revolution and who, after their victory, set about organizing their economic life on a communal basis,” (Arshinov, 2011). The communes were linked federally and decided on politics, economics, as well

as defense— however their full flourishing was prevented by the constant state of war (Arshinov, 2011). While the insurgent peasants, Makhnovshchina revolution, and the Revolutionary Insurgent Army of Ukraine fought and won against their local exploiting-class, Austro-German imperialists, the White Army, and Ukrainian nationalists: they were eventually betrayed and defeated by the much larger Bolshevik forces (Arshinov, 2011). As the revolution progressed into its later period, people had to focus on the revolutionary war so much that it was at the expense of the further flourishing of reconstructive and socially creative aspects of the revolution (Arshinov, 2011). Additional reasons for its limits included, according to Makhno and his comrades, the lack of a sufficiently organized and populated anarchist movement that could have further helped catalyze movements within and beyond the region (Dielo Truda, 2009). The lack of a sufficiently organized anarchist movement is part of how the Bolsheviks were able to come to power and seize the revolutionary helm at the expense of peasants, the working class, and socialism.

Quoting Makhno extensively about the fundamentals of the communes: *“Once the communes were set up, their members, without losing any time, began to organize themselves: some were employed in the normal springtime agricultural work, while others formed combat groups to defend the Revolution and its conquests... The majority of the agricultural communes were composed of peasants; a minority were a mixture of peasants and workers. Their organization was based on equality and... solidarity. All members of these communes... brought a very positive attitude to their work, whether it was in the field or domestic work... The communes had common kitchens and dining halls. But the wish of any members to prepare their own food for their families, or to prepare food in the communal kitchen and then carry it home, never met with any objection from the other members. Each member, or even a whole group, could organize their feeding any way they wished, on condition, however, that they give advance notice to the other members so the appropriate dispositions could be made in the communal kitchen and pantry... The members of a commune were also required to get up early to tend to the cattle and horses and take care of other domestic chores... Members of the commune had the right to absent themselves, but they were required to advise their work partner in advance so a replacement could be found. This applied to normal work days. On days of rest (Sundays) members took turns going on excursions. The program of work of the whole commune was worked out during meetings of all the members. Each of the members knew exactly what was expected from them... Each commune was composed of a dozen families of peasants and workers, reaching a size of 100, 200, or even 300 members. Each commune received from former estates of pomeshechiks, by the decision of the Raion Congress of Land Committees, a quantity of land which it would be able to farm with its own labor. Moreover, the communes received the livestock and machinery which were already on the property.”* (Makhno, 2009).

Shinmin/KPAM:

The communes of the Shinmin Prefecture (1929-1931) were forged by Korean refugees escaping and opposed to Japanese imperialism— with roots in regional anarchist movements as well as prior movements against Japanese imperialism (Ki-Rak, 2012). “Many Koreans gathered in Manchuria to avoid oppression from the Japanese Empire, following the Japanese colonization of the Korean peninsula, forming their own society there,” (Min, 2016). This revolution “was formed in 1929... as a self-governing network of cooperatives, prefiguring anarchist principles while resisting Japanese occupation,” (Ramnath, 2019). The Korean Anarchist Federation

in Manchuria (KAFM), distinct from many other kinds of anarchist groups, formed a “cooperative...organization on the basis of economic communities,” the eventual goal of which was to establish “an autonomous rural organization in which the farmers as members were mutually aiding one another for their survival in the harsh natural environment of Manchuria. It was thus “a practical...organization” to deal with the livelihood of the Koreans in Manchuria, who numbered about two million at the time of its establishment in 1929,” (Hwang, 2016). To further understand the goal orientation of such communal associations, KAFM said in its platform that, “its defined goal was to realize a society of “no rule,” in which human dignity and individual freedom were all completely ensured. In such a society, all individuals were expected to be socially equal and freely strive for their individual development through their own free will and free alliance based on the mutual aid idea. And finally all the individuals would strive to establish an economic order under which they could offer their labor for production according to their ability and then consume according to their needs,” (Hwang, 2016).

However, the KAFM was soon resolved and integrated into KPAM (Korean People’s Association in Manchuria) (Hwang, 2016). The integration into KPAM happened “in August 1929, just a month after its establishment in July,” (Hwang, 2016). KPAM was forged through a strange alliance between anarchists and nationalists against mutual enemies (Imperial Japan and Marxist-Leninists) (Hwang, 2016). “In Manchuria, Korean anarchists were willing to work together with nationalists as long as the latter considered and adopted anarchist principles in their response to the demands and needs of Korean migrants there,” (Hwang, 2016). It was thus based on practical necessity and utilizing anarchist practices to meet such needs (Hwang, 2016). This “new commune-type organization” was supported by nearly “all Korean anarchists in China,” (Jang-Whan, 2009). KPAM organized federally on community scales, “going from village meetings to district and area conferences,” (Tokologo African Anarchist Collective et al., 2014). “Each regional division of the KPAM was the agriculture association and therefore served as a regional administration handling matters ranging from executive, judicial, finance, to education, security, picking between 5 and 9 members to carry out each task,” (Min, 2016).

KPAM “has been highly evaluated by Korean anarchists as the embodiment of anarchist principles...,” and yet, “it was not an anarchist organization. It rather defined itself in its platform as “an autonomous, self-ruling, cooperative organization” that had its own distinctive jurisdiction, similar to its predecessor,” KAFM (Hwang, 2016). KPAM’s “plans for agricultural development, education, and military training within its jurisdiction, as well as for its representative system along with its administrative body, have all been praised as a reflection of the anarchist ideal of “a government without [compulsory] government” that assured the principles of no-rule, no-naked power, and no-exploitation,” (Hwang, 2016). Prior to its collapse, KPAM operated, “in an anarchistic manner. It was structured in accordance with anarchist principles of bottom-up organization, based on free association. Each region would send their share of delegates who would manage the main issues of the association, and the general association would take care of all paperwork, decide on foreign affairs, and public relations. Each region would hold a meeting to choose delegates and write proposals to the main branch, (Min, 2016). KPAM operated in a genuinely bottom up way until it was ultimately defeated by a deadly combination of factors which included attacks by Marxist-Leninist, Japanese Imperialist, and nationalist forces (Min, 2016).

Anarchist Collectives in the Spanish Revolution:

The anarchist revolution within the Spanish Revolution (1936-1939) had both syndicalist and communalist dimensions. The communalist practices were predominant among the more agricul-

tural regions where territorial and economic functions were combined in a commune form with related general assemblies and commons as well federated relations between communities— with immense success except for being sabotaged by opponents and the war (Guerin, 1970). Quoting Bookchin, community assemblies “usually met weekly and formulated the policy decisions of the community as a whole,” and “decisions were executed by a committee elected from the assembly,” where “the right to recall committee members was taken for granted and they certainly enjoyed no privileges, emoluments, or institutional power,” (Dolgoft and Bookchin, 2011). The communes established mixed methods of collectivist and communist distribution systems (Gueurin, 1970). Over 90% of land workers chose to join the agricultural communes which helped create favorable conditions for workers in the more industrial areas of the revolution (Guerin, 1970). Afterall, agricultural areas were crucial for social reproduction of the revolution as such. Solving the agrarian question along common and communistic lines is crucial for meeting needs and autonomy from capitalism (Kropotkin, 1906). In addition to the rural communes “In some cases, as in Fraga, and in Rubi, the direct organisation by the city, embracing the whole, merges with that of the producing Collective, and one could say that the two structures interpenetrate. Locally, self-determination of the whole asserted itself, and the of the town was confirmed,” (Leval, 2006).

Quoting at length from Gaston Leval’s evaluation of the anarchist Collectives at length:

*“In juridical principles the collectives were something entirely new. They were not syndicates, nor were they municipalities in **any traditional** sense... They were closer to the communal than the syndicalist spirit. Often they might just as well have been called communities, as for example the one in Binefar was. The collective was an entity; within it, occupational and professional groups, public services, trade and municipal functions were subordinate and dependent. In forms of organization, in internal functioning, and in their specialized activities, however, they were autonomous... The agrarian collectives, despite their name, were to all intents and purposes libertarian communist organizations. They applied the rule “from each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs.” Where money was abolished, a certain quantity of goods was assured to each person; where money was retained, each family received a wage determined by the number of members. Though the technique varied, the moral principle and the practical results were the same...In the agrarian collectives solidarity was practiced to the greatest degree. Not only was every person assured of the necessities, but the district federations increasingly adopted the principle of mutual aid on an inter-collective scale. For this purpose they created common reserves to help out villages less favored by nature. In Castile special institutions for this purpose were created. In industry this practice seems to have begun in Hospitalet, on the Catalan railways, and was applied later in Alcoy. Had the political compromise not impeded open socialization, the practices of mutual aid would have been much more generalized...A conquest of enormous importance was the right of women to livelihood, regardless of occupation or function. In about half of the agrarian collectives, the women received the same wages as men... The child’s right to livelihood was also ungrudgingly recognized: not as a state charity, but as a right no one dreamed of denying. The schools were open to children to the age of 14 or 15 — the only guarantee that parents would not send their children to work sooner, and that education would really be universal... In all the agrarian collectives of Aragon, Catalonia, Levant, Castile, Andalusia, and Estremadura, the workers formed groups to divide the labor or the land; usually they were assigned to definite areas. Delegates elected by the work groups met with the collective’s delegate for agriculture to plan out the work. This typical organization arose quite spontaneously, by local initiative... In addition to these methods — and similar meetings of specialized groups — the collective as a whole met in a weekly, bi-weekly or monthly assembly. This too was a spontaneous*

innovation. The assembly reviewed the activities of the councillors it named, and discussed special cases and unforeseen problems. All inhabitants — men and women, producers and non producers — took part in the discussion and decisions. In many cases the “individualists” (non-collective members) had equal rights in the assembly... In land cultivation the most significant advances were: the rapidly increased use of machinery and irrigation; greater diversification; and forestation. In stock raising: the selection and multiplication of breeds; the adaption of breeds to local conditions; and large-scale construction of collective stock barns.

Production and trade were brought into increasing harmony and distribution became more and more unified... In Aragon, the Federation of Collectives, founded in January, 1937, began to coordinate trade among the communes of the region, and to create a system of mutual aid. The tendency to unity became more distinct with the adoption of a single “producer’s card” and a single “consumer’s card” — which implied suppression of all money, local and national — by a decision of the February, 1937 Congress. Coordination of trade with other regions, and abroad, improved steadily. When disparities in exchange, or exceptionally high prices, created surpluses, they were used by the Regional Federation to help the poorer collectives. Solidarity thus extended beyond the district... The first step toward socialization was frequently the dividing up of large estates (as in the Segorbe and Granollers districts and a number of Aragon villages). In certain other cases the first step was to force the municipalities to grant immediate reforms (municipalization of land-rent and of medicine in Elda, Benicarlo, Castellone, Alcaniz, Caspé, etc.)... Education advanced at an unprecedented pace. Most of the partly or wholly socialized collectives and municipalities built at least one school. By 1938, for example, every collective in the Levant Federation had its own school... The character of the collectives varied of course with local conditions... Although their juridical principles were strictly anarchist, a great many collectives were created spontaneously by people remote from our movement (“libertarians” without being aware of it)... Membership in the collective was voluntary: the “individualists” joined only if they were persuaded of the advantages of working in common,” (Dolgoft and Bookchin, 2011).

Additionally: the Mujeres Libres who fought for increased women’s freedom within the revolution were: “collectivist and communalist in orientation” and “committed to a vision of society in which the self-development of each is connected to the development of all,” where “freedom and equality, individual identity and community, were understood to be mutually interdependent,” believing that, “empowerment could take place only in the context of communities and/or organizations that acknowledged and valued the diversity of their constituents,” (Ackelsberg, 2005).

The factors leading to the destruction of the revolution are numerous but include Francoist/Fascist military victory over Spain, Stalinist betrayals and attacks against the anarchist, syndicalist, and communalist revolution, as well as CNT and anarchist compromises with the popular front/Republican government.

Zapatistas / ACGAZ:

The Zapatista Revolution has been ongoing since 1994 (EZLN, 2005). Zapatista communities are rooted in community assemblies and related direct democracy— where power comes from below instead of from above (EZLN, 2005, Sixth Commission of the EZLN, 2016, Subcommander Moisés, 2023). The current structure of Zapatista autonomy is called ACGAZ which stands for

Assemblies of Collectives of Zapatista Autonomous Governments (Subcommander Moisés, 2023). Zapatistas strive, “Not to make agreements from above to be imposed below, but to make accords to go together to listen and to organize outrage. Not to raise movements which are later negotiated behind the backs of those who made them, but to always take into account the opinions of those participating. Not to seek gifts, positions, advantages, public positions, from the Power or those who aspire to it, but to go beyond the election calendar,” (EZLN, 2005).

The Zapatistas are composed of multiple Indigenous peoples, cultures, and languages– and includes non-indigenous people as well (Sixth Commission of the EZLN, 2016). EZLN, 2016). Zapatista politics include influences from indigenous traditions of self-management as well as influence coming from anarchism, Marxism, the original Zapatistas, Magonism, and even Liberation Theology (Lynd and Grubacic, 2008). Neo-Zapatismo should be recognized as its own unique praxis– which is not to say that there are commonalities with other distinct theories and practices rooted in community-self-management and commoning. The Zapatista revolution has been a revolution against the capitalist hydra. The Zapatista revolution has been a struggle for freedom and autonomy from capitalism, the state, imperialism, colonialism, and patriarchy (Sixth Commission of the EZLN, 2016). In addition to self-management and sharing of social re/production, the Zapatistas have developed a culture of fighting against patriarchal values inherited and passed down from colonial and capitalist forms of patriarchy (Sixth Commission of the EZLN, 2016).

The Zapatistas have related common economics where people make agreements for common and collective work (Sixth Commission of the EZLN, 2016, El Capitan, 2023). Decisions are made from below in assemblies and those delegated from below “have to follow the will of the assembly,” (Sixth Commission of the EZLN). When policies delegates want to perform are not mandated from below a given community agreement, delegates have to consult communities and get community approvals for new policies (Sixth Commission of the EZLN). “The people organize in assemblies where they begin to express their opinions, and from there, proposals emerge, and these proposals are studied for their advantages and disadvantages to decide which one is best. Before making a decision, the proposals are taken back to the people and the assembly for approval. In this way, a decision can be made in accordance with the majority of the communities. This is Zaparista life in the communities. It has become our culture,” (Sixth Commission of the EZLN).

Solutions to social problems “can come from a community, from a particular group, or it can come from an individual– something that a companero or companera suggests,” (Sixth Commission of the EZLN). Policies and decisions about commons as well as common and collective work are made in community assemblies; and the assemblies help to monitor politics, economics, and their various councils and delegates that administer various projects (Sixth Commission of the EZLN). “For the collective work projects that we are discussing, what has really helped us is working in the following manner: dividing the month into... days of collective work and... days of family work. Each person agrees. Some places might decide differently... But each place makes their agreement at the level of the community or the region or Autonomous Municipality or the zone. These are the four levels at which the collective work projects take place, which is to say there are four levels of assemblies, which is to say four levels at which to come to agreement,” (Sixth Commission of the EZLN, 2016). “The Zapatista communities use the caracol to call and convoke the collective. For example, if there is a community problem, an issue that has to be resolved, the caracol is sounded and all of the community knows that there is a collective meeting

so that thought can be spoken and we can see what we might do to resist,” (Sixth Commission of the EZLN, 2016). Zapatistas have continued to restructure themselves in a way that better approximates their ideals and aspirations while adapting to conditions (Subcommander Moisés, 2023, El Capitan, 2023). In doing so, they have continued to further develop community-self-management and commoning. It is a living revolution.

“...Self-government; it’s not that we can’t do it, but that it’s a struggle to do it. We have achieved it through our resistance and rebellion because we do a lot of political work, ideological work, a lot of explaining about how we see capitalism, and a lot of evaluating of how we are doing as an organization,” (Sixth Commission of the EZLN, 2016)

Rojava / DAANES:

The Rojava revolution, ongoing since 2012, consists of directly democratic community assemblies and federations thereof (Knapp et al., 2016, Dirik, 2022, Allsopp and Wilgenburg, 2019, DAANES, 2023). “The field research carried out in Rojava shows that all the decision-making processes have been carried out in the form of assemblies,” (Aslan, 2023). Relatedly, Rojava has a social contract with rights, duties, and political-power along egalitarian lines (DAANES, 2023). Assemblies have been key in restructuring daily life and social relations along lines of mutual freedom and mutual aid (Aslan, 2023). Quoting the DAANES social contract, “We are determined to establish a democratic system based on democratic autonomous administrations, achieve justice and equality among all peoples and communities, preserve all cultural, religious and ideological identities, spread a culture of diversity and tolerance, reject all types of violence and take the principle of legitimate defense as a basis,” (DAANES, 2023).

Further quoting from the DAANES social contract: “The Democratic Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria organizes its democratic and free community life based on the formation of: communes, councils, academies, cooperatives, community economic units and institutions that complement the community system, which organize themselves in a confederal manner. The democratic system of society develops and is consolidated based on these institutions,” (DAANES, 2003). Further, “The commune... is the basic grassroots organization form of direct democracy. It is the smallest administrative unit in the Democratic Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria. It is the place where the moral-political community develops, which produces social, economic and cultural life. The commune is a self-contained council and is the place of decision-making, administration and has the power to resolve social issues within the administrative and organizational fields,” (DAANES, 2003). The democratic confederal structure federates from commune scale to broader intercommunal scales on neighborhood, village, town, city, broader regional, cantonal, to a broader inter-cantonal people’ council (DAANES, 2003).

Quoting the DAANES social contract, “The societal revolution that was achieved under the leadership of women in North and East Syria opened the way for an intellectual and social renaissance, and women became a fundamental pillar of our democratic system,” Rojava is a revolution rooted in democracy, ecology, and women’s liberation (Dirik, 2022). The Rojava Revolution seeks to liberate politics, economics, and everyday life from patriarchy, capitalism, the state, and bigotry along lines of ethnicity. Rojava is also rooted in equal rights and ethnic pluralism; coexistence and mutual flourishing of many people with many languages, religious views, and cultures (Dirik, 2022, DAANES, 2023). The guiding political praxis of Rojava was formulated by Abdullah

Ocalan and is called Democratic Confederalism (Ocalan, 2014). The Democratic Confederalist approach emerged through a struggle within the Kurdish Freedom movement to become more free and egalitarian– a struggle that was primarily led by women (Dirik, 2022). Democratic Confederalism is highly influenced by Murray Bookchin’s communalism (which is a branch of libertarian socialism/communism). The notion of self-management that Democratic Confederalism puts forward is political, economic, and social (Ocalan, 2014, Aslan, 2023). In this social transformation, community assemblies were used to fill power vacuums, meet needs of people, and organize defense of people in response to the chaos of Syria and the Syrian civil war (Knapp et al., 2016). Rojava was the main force that fought against and defeated ISIS, Rojava has functionally expropriated mass territory, and Rojava has defended itself against aggression from the state of Turkey and Turkish-Proxy forces. Rojava has self defense militias that are embedded within and mandated by local communes and confederations thereof (DAANES, 2023).

Quoting Ocalan, the economic goal of Democratic Confederalism is to create a world where each “community... decides what society needs to survive, as well as how much should be produced to satisfy this need; how, where and with whom to cooperate, and how, by whom and with whom the fruits of production will be shared,” (Aslan, 2023). The aspirations of Democratic Confederalism also include moving beyond money, an ecological society, as well as communal, collective, and personal use replacing property (Aslan, 2023). Rojava has a communal economy and related commons that function through community assemblies and collective action to meet needs (Knapp et al., 2016, Allsopp and Wilgenburg, 2019, Dirik, 2022, DAANES, 2023).

Assemblies, committees thereof, collective work of people in everyday life, and cooperatives are aspects of the communal economy in Rojava (Aslan, 2023). And “decisions concerning cooperatives are not taken solely by its members, but also by the assemblies of the communities where the cooperatives are located. This collective process allows the larger community, and not just the workers, to create a culture of production that meets their needs. The underlying assumption is that the formation of cooperatives must develop independently of market conditions in order to enable the creation of autonomous power,” (Aslan, 2023). But if one just looks to the formal cooperatives one will miss the extent of cooperatizing and mutual-aid as part of assemblies, embedded councils thereof, commons, and transformed social relations (Aslan, 2023). While Rojava has a communal economy via commune, various formal, informal, permanent, and temporary committees and mutual-aid/commoning: Rojava is limited by multiple factors such as external war and blockades, some hangovers from prior economic inequalities of land tenure, local markets, external markets, internal conflicts between economic sectors, uneven support for communalization between communities, etc. (Aslan, 2023). “Even as the revolution takes place, capitalism as a phenomenon and concrete understanding is striving to exist and dominate in Rojava to counter the revolutionary process (counterrevolution), as are the state and power, or patriarchy, visible in the form of ISIS,” (Aslan, 2023). Finding ways to defend against and resolving hierarchical threats while also forging paths towards continued communalization of internal inequalities and fragmentations overtime would be a way of resolving these contradictions (Aslan, 2023). Social transformation in Rojava has been in a process of making, destroying, and recreating various policies and is a living revolution (Aslan, 2023).

Conclusion:

The above amalgamation can help contribute to a history of community-self-management, commoning, and freedom more broadly. The above helps highlight the extensive communalist dimensions within these libertarian socialist influenced revolutionary movements. Additionally, the above highlights communalist dimensions within libertarian socialism/libertarian communist theory and practice more broadly. Each of these revolutionary movements are simultaneously part of local, interlocal, and transnational historical developments and causes; the movements and the extensive communalist dimensions thereof can be better understood more holistically when in relationship to broader historical context/embeddedness (and the myriad of relevant political, economic, social, cultural, and ecological variables– including heterogeneous as well as non-ideal features of each respective revolution).

Each of these revolutionary movements includes community assemblies and commoning related to reconstruction of self-management as well as opposition to and defense against domination. These revolutions involved communalized decision-making+action, land, social re/production, agriculture, water, energy, buildings, infrastructure, tools, education, healthcare, self-defense, etc. There are commonalities as well as plurality within and between various assemblies and commons that are part of each of these revolutionary movements– as well as between such revolutionary movements. The general features of community-self-management and commoning can develop in multiple ways and adapt to a plurality of conditions and relevant variables. We know from a broader history of freedom that community-self-management and commoning can be resilient among large numbers of people over long periods of time, on communal and intercommunal scales across multiple modes of subsistence (Boehm, 2001, Bookchin, 2005, Federici, 2018, Ostrom, 2021). There is more than enough historical data to say that it is possible for the building blocks of community assemblies, embedded councils, mutual aid, and collective action to scale upwards via confederation. The continuation of the living Rojava and Zapatista revolutions further demonstrate resilience and longevity of large numbers of people organizing communal/intercommunal/common forms of politics and economics in spite of absurdly difficult conditions.

The community-assemblies and commons part of these 6 revolutions are largely in harmony with modified versions of Ostrom’s core-design-principles for well-functioning commons (Ostrom, 2021, Usufruct Collective, 2024). All of these revolutionary movements have included: Participants of groups who know what the groups they are participating in are about, agreements to share in collective action and the fruits thereof, adaptations to local conditions, collective choice arrangements (assembly+deliberation+direct democracy+non-hierarchy), sufficient organizational and economic transparency for relevant economic monitoring from below, forms of disapproval and defense against domination, forms of conflict resolution, and existence within larger polycentric networks (Ostrom, 2021, Usufruct Collective, 2024). These revolutionary movements led to tremendous increases of political, economic, social, and individual freedom. In addition to such increases in political, economic, social, and individual freedom, these revolutions all created vast increases in relatedness among people as well as effective/ethical practice orientation dealing with self-managing political economic life.

Humans have needs for autonomy/self-management, relatedness, and effective practice/goal orientations (Ryan and Deci, 2022a, 2022b). Community-self-management and functional commons increase collective and individual autonomy and relatedness and effective+ethical collec-

tive action. Community-self-management and commoning have means and ends that can, if actuated and creatively adapted to context, lead to the flourishing of such needs being fulfilled on political, economic, social, and everyday scales. Well-functioning co-federated community-self-management and commoning embed collective and individual self-determination within social relations of mutual-freedom and mutual non-domination— where self interest and social interest are harmonized and needs of all are met through deliberation, collective-decision-making, and mutual aid+collective action. Horizontal, participatory, directly-democratic community assemblies, commons, and co-federations thereof shift social relations and contribute to greater sharing and caring within and between communities. Such a shift in social relations leads to greater flourishing of relatedness and solidarity. Such community assemblies and related commons make it so that which affects all and that which all need is deliberated upon, decided on, and managed by participants— as opposed to state, capitalist/private, or even relatively private ownership/decision making about what communities need and do. Additionally, well functioning community assemblies and commons meet needs of people at the expense of structural violence.

The above criteria of well-functioning commons, political/economic/social self-management (and the means thereof as a gestalt), increased relatedness, increased ethical/effective practices on political/economic/social and individual levels, meeting needs related to a decent standard of living, and decreasing structural violence (and abolishing entangled political/economic/social causes thereof) are related to the good life as well as social and individual flourishing (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2011, Rao and Min, 2017, Ostrom, 2021, Bookchin 2022, Ryan and Deci, 2022a, 2022b). In relation to such criteria of Self-Determination-Theory, the gestalt of social freedom and the means thereof, Ostrom’s rules for managing the commons, meeting needs (including decent standard of living for all) at the expense of structural violence and causes thereof: we can evaluate community-self-management and commoning as beneficial to overall social freedom and flourishing. And from the above criteria, we can even claim sufficient communalization (so that communities can self-manage political/economic life) is constitutive of overall social freedom and flourishing. Additionally, in relation to such a gestalt of good criteria, the politics/economics/social relations stemming from the locus control of these 6 revolutionary movements can be evaluated as overwhelmingly positive. Such a positive evaluation is in spite of real imperfections and fallibilities of these revolutions such as insufficient communalization/communization in some sectors of the economy OR other issues like making compromises at the expense of strategic considerations and even principles at times. Community-self-management and commoning within these 6 specific revolutions also can be evaluated as overwhelmingly positive in relation to normative criteria of good rights+duties in relation to social freedom, increased needs met+ increased well-being, virtue forming practices+social relations+institutions, as well as the tripartite criteria of liberty/equality/solidarity.

***And on a brief but important tangent, given the most essential features of social ecology, the above analysis can be ecologized accordingly since: 1. Contemporary ecological problems are social problems caused by capitalism, the state, and hierarchy more broadly 2. the full flourishing of social freedom and wellbeing requires related ecological flourishing 3. Self management of each and all on every scale+means thereof is a precondition for ecological flourishing AND 4. We have the potential to be ecologically creative and mutualistic (Bookchin 2022, Usufruct Collective, 2025). Pockets of freedom as well as objective possibilities for a free and ecological society exist alongside and against dominant hierarchical and ecocidal political/economic/social tendencies that are threatening human existence and the broader web of life we are part of and

dependent upon. The very kinds of organization/action spirals that can help lead to long-term social transformation can also help address more immediate practical social and ecological problems (and achieve short-term and mid-term goals from below on the way towards grander social transformation).

And while these revolutionary movements and societies GENERALLY satisfy Ostrom's 8 core-design-principles, one of Ostrom's core-design-principles was intentionally left out in the above positive evaluation section; the one left out was the minimal rights to organize by relevant external parties. This was left out there and then mentioned here to highlight that these revolutionary movements have NOT been meaningfully granted anything approximating the minimal rights to organize by relevant external parties. The autonomy of all these revolutionary projects has been attacked externally from multiple directions by multiple hierarchical forces and systems. The autonomy these movements have been able to develop was created, seized, and defended by participants in spite of absurdly harsh terrain.

Developing sufficient autonomy from external hierarchical forces is crucial for long term commoning and social transformation. This is particularly difficult to do within world capitalism and the interstate system, even more difficult to do when being directly and indirectly attacked, and even more difficult to do when being directly and indirectly attacked on multiple fronts by various combinations of capitalist, state, and other kinds of hierarchical forces. Those difficulties are amplified by the lack of sufficient worldwide libertarian/egalitarian movements+revolutions against hierarchical society. And while commons have been under attack by hierarchical politics, economics, and social relations for several thousands of years, there has been an intensified attack on the commons within the last several hundred years via the expansion and globalization of capitalism, contemporary statecraft, and the interstate system. Inversely, there have been new forms of struggles against hierarchical society within this period– such as but far from limited to the 6 revolutionary movements discussed in this essay.

As Caffentzis points out, the main way that commons are destroyed is through attacks on the commons by capitalist and state forces (Barbagallo et al., 2019). By learning about how specific systems, institutions, and social relations inter-relate and affect specific communities and commons, we can gain a better understanding of specific communities and commons while also gaining a better understanding of hierarchical forces inhibiting the flourishing thereof. This is not to say that there are no internal problems that stem from the “locus of control” of various social movements, communities, and collectives– such as through people making less than good enough decisions (and, even worse, foolish decisions that go against liberatory principles and goals). However, it is also important to note that the worst decisions these revolutionary movements and societies make cannot be so easily disentangled from the context they are embedded within and the attacks upon them from hierarchical society and instantiations thereof. Quoting Dolgoff, “anarchist and non-anarchist critics of the conduct and policies of our comrades must never lose sight of the fact that these constructive achievements were made under the worst possible circumstances,” (Dolgoff, 2011). The above quote rings true not just for the Spanish Revolution for all 6 of these revolutions. As Massimo De Angelis points out while synthesizing aspects of Ostrom and Caffentzis: commons are “constituted not only by their internal relations, but also by their relations to their environment,” (Barbagallo et al., 2019). It is both the case that “the ability of a commons to sustain itself depends on its management principles, even if we are talking about self-management,” AND that any commons sustaining as a liberatory force within the current hierarchical world order depend “on power relations vis-à-vis capital (and the state),” which at-

tempt, “to enclose (and thus destroy) or to coopt,” commons by, “sucking surplus value by using commons as a way to suppress social wages,” (Barbagallo et al., 2019).

Given both ‘external’ and ‘internal’ causes of destruction of commons, social movements, and libertarian socialist influenced revolutionary movements: sufficiently communalizing power, politics, economics, social re/production, and self-defense against domination– in tandem with mass solidarity, co-federation, and generalized interlocalization of the above– can help revolutionary movements sustain and continue towards their own aspired goals through a unity of means/ends adapting to relevant conditions, volitions, capacities, and needs of participants. Such an approach can oppose hierarchies, meet needs, fill power vacuums, bridge short-term, mid-term, and long-term goals/needs, use reconstructive practices of self-management/mutual aid/commoning as part of opposition to domination, and utilize opposition to domination to help develop self-management/mutual-aid/commons. It is also important to note that the social force/power/capacity of these community organizations is generated through their joint reconstructive and oppositional dimensions. Grander interlocalization+co-federation can make it so both local and interlocal social problems can be better addressed and make it so revolutionary movements have more capacity, solidarity, and true allies. Development and prefiguration of liberatory practices, solidarity, and community-self-management+commoning before, during, and after revolutionary moments and openings helps contribute to liberatory social transformation.

The harmony of sufficient organization, self-managed power, popular legitimacy, strategy, tactics, relationships, actions, reconstructive and oppositional dimensions, etc, has made it so these 6 revolutionary movements for social transformation were able to be coordinated and powerful enough to achieve their respective liberatory accomplishments. It is precisely through building blocks of social transformation and spirals of social relations, organizations, and collective actions that such revolutionary social change can be made possible. Each of these 6 revolutionary movements have local, translocal, and transnational liberatory tendencies prior to and coalescing into their respective revolutions. They all include organizations and movements that start out more modest in scope and scale before blooming. Each of these 6 revolutions includes the prefiguration and development of practices of self-management, mutual-aid, and direct action as well as organizations that are rooted in the above (and community forms thereof).

In addition to prefiguration, multiplication, and strategic development of liberatory practices and popular organizations like community assemblies and unions: an important factor in victory of revolutionary movements is the presence+efficacy of sufficiently liberatory ideologically and theoretically specific organizations that function as catalysts towards social movement organizations becoming more ethical and effective. Ideologically and theoretically specific libertarian socialist/communist organizations can help as catalysts towards revolutionary social transformation through social insertion– through members thereof participating in social movement organizations (community assemblies, labor unions, etc.) alongside others as equal participants while working to spread and inculcate further liberatory practices/processes/goals (and oppose authoritarian ones) through dialogue and action (FARJ, 2008). Such an approach would neither be an authoritarian form of vanguardism nor a form of tailism. Dielo Truda and Platformism + FAU, FARJ, and Especifismo speak to this issue well.

Libertarian socialist/communist/communalist praxis has much to offer an approach of commoning against capitalism, the state, and hierarchical society– such as in regards to certain necessary features that must be developed as means/ends that can be adapted to pluriversal contexts as well as various additional formal+strategic+tactical approaches and lessons.

Alongside such hopeful potentialities that are illuminated by the history of freedom and these 6 revolutions, there is a simultaneous revelation about how so many movements that were so grand in qualities, functionality, and scale were destroyed through external hierarchical forces in tandem with tragic mistakes they made along the way that stem from “the locus of control” of these revolutionary movements/societies/participants. And as ethical, beautiful, and brilliant as the history and living development of social freedom is: on one level it does not FULLY capture the potential grandness of community, collective, and individual self-management and related commons blossoming onward overtime, freed from the context of hierarchical society, freed from attacks by hierarchical society, magnified ten-thousand fold (and then some)– towards sufficiency and beyond, full libertarian communism, ecological abundance, post-scarcity, etc. When learning from the history and living development of social freedom, we must continue to take our poetry from the future as well.

Ending with a quote from Azize Aslan:

“Communes and assemblies are important revolutionary practices that generate social transformation and emancipation without creating a state...Society can govern itself, determine its own destiny despite all the contradictions, proving to the people of Rojava and the whole world that this can be achieved in a democratic way,” (Aslan, 2023).

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