

The 1989 “Call for a Libertarian Alternative”

Various Authors

1989

Since the winter of 1986–1987, struggles have followed one after the other. They demand to be given a combative and innovative expression.

The signatories of this appeal address all those women and men who think that under current social and political circumstances a new revolutionary alternative must be established. In our eyes, the creation of a revolutionary movement capable of building on and taking forward the newly revived struggles requires us to take two complementary paths:

- The formation of a new organization for a libertarian communism, which is what this appeal is proposing;
- The emergence of a vast and necessarily pluralist, anti-capitalist, self-management movement, to which organized libertarians will immediately contribute and where they will be active alongside other political tendencies.

We have entered a period of agitation and struggle that lays bare the inability of the Left and the union leaderships to respond to the aspirations of the population.

The “Socialist” Party (PS) manages capitalism, espouses its logic, and abandons any wish to transform society, even social democratic reformism. It opposes the interests of all popular strata. Under cover of “entering modernity” it wants to implement a political and social consensus with the Right and between the different classes. An electoral machine above all, the PS is a party of notables and technocrats where everything is decided at the summit, without any real democracy.

The French “Communist” Party (PCF) has not had a revolutionary perspective for some time. Its leadership makes use of social discontent, but the only model for society it has to offer is a still terribly bureaucratic USSR. It has a completely undemocratic organizational framework and imposes an unbearable grip on huge swaths of the union and social movements.

The union movement is confronted with the reemergence of struggles, but also with aspirations for self-organization that are being vigorously expressed. The chasm has never been so wide between unionized and non-unionized workers, between on the one hand union organizations that choose and self-manage their own battles, and on the other hand the fossilized union apparatuses which are often tied to the PS or the PCF.

The revolutionary, alternative, and ecological Left, with all its variants, does not propose a credible and attractive alternative. The top-down and centralized errors and myths inherited from

Leninism continue to weigh heavily on some. On others, it is the strong temptation to integrate into institutional electoral politics and to constitute a “radical reformist axis” due to the repeated abandonment by social democracy of its project once it reaches power.

The balance sheet of the libertarian movement, such as it exists today, is no more positive and a debate over this point is necessary. For various reasons, we have not succeeded in putting forward a contemporary alternative. And many errors continue, here and there, to tarnish our image: divisions, disorganization, a certain sectarianism, sometimes an unreasoning cult of spontaneity, as well as the retreat into initiatives that have the merit of testifying to an ethical refusal of an alienating society, but which are nevertheless far too ideological and fail to provide the means of acting on social reality.

The signatories of this appeal affirm that there is room for a new libertarian struggle, one which is non-dogmatic, non-sectarian, and attentive to what is happening and what is changing in society. A struggle which is open and at the same time organized to be effective. A coherent, well-defined message, but one that is nevertheless not carved in stone, that is forever the object of reflection and renewal.

It is the aspirations expressed in the struggles for equality, self-organization, and the rejection of the neoliberal logic that lead us to this conclusion. It is also the road left open by the collapse of yesterday’s dominant models: social democracy, Leninism, and Stalinism. Many militants would be open to the ideas of a resolutely anti-capitalist and libertarian current if it were able to engage with contemporary problems.

Finally, many anarchists and other anti-authoritarians have distinguished themselves, some very actively, in the recent battles in the union movement, in the student movement, in the fight against racism and for equality, and in support of the struggles of the Kanak people.[283] Many among them feel the movement is in need of modernization in order to pursue and strengthen their struggles, going beyond the structures and divisions within libertarianism that have most often been inherited from the past.

We propose to base ourselves on these practices in order to organize together a libertarian alternative that responds to the challenges of our time.

This perspective rests on a statement of fact: none of the current libertarian groups is capable of sufficiently representing this alternative. This objective statement in no way questions the value of the work of the various existing organizations. We do not reject them. On the contrary, we invite all organizations, local groups, reviews, and individuals to follow the process, to express themselves and participate in it. Their various experiences must not be rejected and forgotten. A new organization will be all the more rich if it were to succeed in bringing together and capitalizing on the many contributions that preceded it. But we have to do things differently if we are to respond to a new situation. The best way forward seems to us to be one that would take social and militant practice as its starting point as an element of a process under the control of rank-and-file individuals and collectives speaking from their experience, beyond the traditional divisions.

The initiative we are putting forward is therefore the work of a collective of individual signatories and we invite everyone to join in this process.

A contemporary affirmation of a libertarian communism is possible, elaborated on the basis of our social practice and an analysis of society that takes into account its profound economic, sociological, and cultural transformations:

- An aggressive, resolutely anti-capitalist, class struggle orientation in the conditions of today's society.
- A strategy of counter-powers where workers, the young, and the unemployed organize themselves and impose profound transformations through their autonomous struggles. This is a strategy that we oppose to that of change through institutional methods, the actions of parties and office-holders, and the illusion of political reformism. Basing ourselves on these struggles we can today defend a resolutely extra- and anti-parliamentary struggle without imprisoning ourselves in purely ideological campaigns.
- A self-management perspective and a combative strategy with revolution as its goal is practicable now: this libertarian struggle will base itself in social movements and the practice of its militants, practices that are broad-based, inclusive, and carried out without sectarianism. Practices that imply not only the self-management of struggles but also involvement in trade union activity in all of today's organizations (i.e., as much in the CFDT, the CGT, the FEN, and even FO as in the CNT and the independent unions).⁽¹⁾ But also a class-based approach outside as well as inside the workplace, in all aspects of life and society. Struggles against the patriarchal order. Against racism and for equality. Against imperialism, dictatorships, and apartheid. Against militarism. Against nuclear energy and for the defense of the environment. Struggles both of young people in education and those who are either unemployed or in casualized employment.

This libertarian affirmation anchored in present-day realities is very much within the lineage of one of the major currents in the history of the workers' movement.

We are referring—without dogmatism, without wishing to produce a naive apologia, and thus not without a critical spirit, but with a total independence of mind—to the anti-authoritarians of the First International, to the revolutionary syndicalists, to the anarcho-syndicalists, to the libertarian communists or anarchist communists, without neglecting the contribution of council communism, trade unionism, self-management currents, feminism, and ecology. Without losing sight of the fact that it is the struggles of the workers themselves, the social movements of yesterday and today that sustain our reflections.

Bringing all of this heritage to bear on contemporary issues implies syntheses and much modernization on the way to a new political current facing towards the future.

We do not fetishize organization, but in order to elaborate and defend this struggle, organization is a necessity.

An organization means: the pooling of resources, experiences, different focuses, and political education; a place for debate for the elaboration of collective analyses; a means of quickly circulating information and of coordination; the search for a strategy which engages with present-day realities; a platform that expresses our identity.

⁽¹⁾ As the editors of *Pour le communisme libertaire* (the 2003 Spartacus edition of the collection of articles on which the present volume is based) point out, the reference to the various trade union federations and confederations should be updated: "As much in the CGT and the FSU, even in FO, and perhaps the CFDT, as in the CNT and the SUD unions." The CNT (Confederation Nationale du Travail, or National Labour Confederation) was founded in 1946 and modelled on the Spanish CNT. The manifesto's general point is clear: the important thing is to fight for revolutionary practices in *all* the union organizations. [DB]

We must seek a form of self-management of organization that is both democratic and federalist; that does not lead to confusion; that organizes convergences without denying differences; that offers a collective framework without hindering the free speech and activity of all. A self-managed organization, where the main orientations are decided democratically by all, by consensus or, if not, by vote. An effective organization with the necessary structures and means. An organization aimed at international practices and an international dimension at a time when Europe is in preparation.⁽²⁾ It has always been the case that the anti-capitalist struggle cannot be contained within the narrow framework of each state.

We must also stress that we are not proposing a sect that will have no other end than its own growth. We must create a form of activism where commitment will not be all-consuming and alienating.

One of the assets of a new organization could be the publishing of a new type of press capable of reaching a broader public, which would be the expression of a current and an organization, certainly, but also an open tribune: a press self-managed by the militants; a a portion of its columns as a permanent forum, open and pluralistic, where the militants of social movements and of revolutionary, libertarian, and self-management currents could express themselves.

⁽²⁾ This text was written a few years after the Single European Act of 1986, which paved the way for the creation of a single market and single currency, but before their actual creation and the emergence of the European Union. [DB]

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Appendix of *For a Libertarian Communism*
This Appeal was signed in May 1989 by around a hundred libertarians, political, trade union
and social movement activists, members of various organizations and of none. Originally
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