

The Anarchist Library
Anti-Copyright



Towards a Libertarian Communism

Daniel Guérin

Daniel Guérin
Towards a Libertarian Communism
Autumn 1988

libcom.org

theanarchistlibrary.org

Autumn 1988

Contents

Luxemburg v. Lenin	5
Anarchism	6
Libertarian Socialism	7
Not a Dogma	7

social-democracy, that it will not be authoritarian but libertarian and self-managing, or, if you like, councillist.

Of all the reading which I did, in 1930, on the boat which took me to Indochina and back, of books which ranged from Marx to Proudhon, to Georges Sorel, to Hubert Lagardelle, to Fernand Pelloutier, to Lenin and Trotsky, those of Marx had without any doubt the greatest impact. These (books) opened my eyes, uncovered the mysteries of capitalist surplus-value, taught me about historical materialism and the dialectic. Entering, from then on, into the revolutionary movement, throwing overboard my bourgeois gown, I was initially, instinctually anti-Stalinist; at that time I was a left socialist around Marceau Pivert and a revolutionary syndicalist under the influence of Pierre Monatte. Later, the writings of Bakunin, in the six-volume edition of Max Nettlau/James Guillaume, were like a second operation for cataract. They left me for ever allergic to any version of authoritarian socialism whether it calls itself Jacobin, Marxist or Trotskyist.

It was under the commotion provoked in me by these writings (of Bakunin) that I was led to fundamentally revise the admiration I had held for the revolutionary strategy of Lenin, to re-work (my view) of this idol and proceed to an in-depth critique of certain authoritarian conceptions of the Bolshevik leader. I concluded, from this internal debate, that socialism would have to rid itself of the worn-out notion of the dictatorship of the proletariat, in order to recover its authentic libertarianism.

Luxemburg v. Lenin

This was what led me, in my historical work on the French Revolution, to substitute everywhere for the words dictatorship of the proletariat those of revolutionary constraint. Following this, I paid more attention to that lightning-quick process which Rosa Luxembourgh had counterpoised to the ultra-centralism of Lenin and the sterile character of his bureaucratic substitutionism. Much later, in

1971, I deepened my analysis of Luxembourgeoisism and attempted to emphasise her relative kinship with libertarian spontaneity.

The epoch when I was discovering Bakunin and re-reading Rosa was, in terms of the class struggle, the time of the Hungarian revolution and its savage suppression by Russian tanks. I felt, for my part, less interested in the political about-turns of that attempt at liberation from the yoke of Moscow, because it was charged through with disquieting ambiguities, than by the ephemeral flourishing of the Hungarian workers' councils.

Anarchism

My libertarianism passed through successive phases: in the beginning what I would call a classical anarchism, which found expression in *Youth of Libertarian Socialism* (1959), then *Anarchism, from Theory to Practice* (1965) and, simultaneously, *Neither God nor Master: Anthology of Anarchism*, where besides Bakunin, there was space for Stirner, Proudhon, Kropotkin, Malatesta and many others.

Then moving on a good bit from classical anarchism, and not turning my back for an instant on my marxian studies, I published *For a Libertarian Marxism* (1969), which title, I'm sure, confused and shocked some of my new libertarian friends. Then, just before the revolutionary tumult of May '68, into which I plunged up to the neck, I rejoined the Libertarian Communist Movement (MCL around Georges Fontenis (returned from his authoritarian gaps!). Later I was with the Libertarian Communist Organisation (OCL), in its first and second forms, and then, right up until today, the Union of Libertarian Communist Workers (UTCL).

Libertarian Socialism

During a quarter century, therefore I aligned myself, and still do, with libertarian socialism or communism (the word anarchist seems to me too restrictive and I don't use it unless it is joined by the word communist). This libertarian communism is different, though it can be combined with, the utopia propagated by the school of Kropotkin, anticipating the era of abundance. Specifically, Libertarian Communism, as I understand it, is a combination of the best of both anarchism and the thought of Marx. I tried to disentangle these disparate elements in a pamphlet called *Anarchism and Marxism* which was added on to the second edition of my little book *Anarchism* (1981).

In the evening of my life, I certainly do not claim to have foreseen, except in very broad outlines, the definitive crystallisation of an uneasy and informal synthesis. H.E., Kaminski, in his biography of Bakunin, thought it was necessary and inevitable, but that it was more for the future than for the present to formulate. It must come from the new social storms which will emerge, and which no-one today can pride themselves on bringing about.

Not a Dogma

I hope I have been, throughout my militant engagement, a historian and theoretician to advantage. It seems to me highly presumptuous to announce, among other things, what aspects of anarchism and the floating thoughts of Marx are, or are not reconcilable. Libertarian Communism is as yet only an approximation, and not a dogma of absolute truth.

It cannot, it seems to me, define itself on paper absolutely. It will not be a rationalisation of the past, but a rallying point for the future. The main conviction which animates me is that the future social revolution will not be Muscovite despotism nor anaemic