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Why “Libertarian Communist”?

Daniel Guérin

May 1969

My education was anti-Stalinist Marxist. But for a good long while I have been foolhardy enough to draw heavily on the treasure chest of libertarian thought, ever relevant and alive on condition that it is first stripped of a not insignificant number of childish, utopian, and romantic notions as little useful as they are out of date.

Hence a misunderstanding that is all but inevitable but embittered by a certain bad faith on the part of my opponents: the Marxists have turned their backs on me as an anarchist, and the anarchists, because of my Marxism, have not always wanted to view me as one of them.

A young, neophyte—and hence sectarian—Marxist even thought he saw in my writings the assuaging of a consciousness that was “torn” between Marxism and anarchism and tossed desperately back and forth between the two, when in fact it is without the least such vacillation or any concern for my personal intellectual comfort that I believe in both the need for and the practicability of a synthesis between Marxism and anarchism.

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Chapter from *For a Libertarian Communism*

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Recently a working-class newspaper of Trotskyist bent and, let it be said in passing, of high quality, assured its readers that I had gone over from Marxism to anarchism. Taking advantage of the right to respond that was democratically afforded me, I responded to this inaccurate statement, the fruit of a basic need to catalogue everyone, that I was making “a contribution to the search for a synthesis between Marxism and anarchism.” “A synthesis,” I added, “that since May ’68 has moved from the realm of ideas to that of action.”

But I was still seeking a denomination, since in order to communicate we all need a label. The one I had decided on ten years ago, that of “libertarian socialist,” no longer seemed to me appropriate, for there are many kinds of socialism, from social democratic reformism to “revisionist communism” and an adulterated humanism. In short, the word “socialism” belongs to the category of debased words.

Italian students with whom I had debated Marxism and anarchism in general and self-management in particular, provided me with the label: these young people call themselves libertarian Marxists. In truth this is not a discovery: the protesters of May in France, red and black flags mixed together, were libertarian Marxists, without being aware of it or calling themselves such.

Hence the title of this book. Assembled here are a certain number of texts, varied in their subject matter and the periods in which they were written, but which all converge from various roads on the approach to a libertarian communism.

The short book published under the title *Anarchism* might have created a double misunderstanding: that I espoused all the ideas laid out in it for information purposes, and also that I showed myself unable to draw from this digest a synthesis of

⁽¹⁾ Guérin is referring to *L’Anarchisme, de la doctrine à la pratique* first published in 1965 by Gallimard. It was published in English as *Anarchism: From Theory to Practice* (Monthly Review Press, 1970), with an Introduction by Noam Chomsky. [DB]

my own devising, which would be valid in the present and the future.⁽¹⁾ This supposition was doubly inexact, for I willingly effaced myself before the subject. In the present collection I attempt to fly with my own wings. At my own risk.

The materials presented here are followed by the date they were written, though some retouching was done in order to bring the style and content up to date.

The revolution that is rising before us will be—already is—libertarian communist.

May 1969