

Demystifying Left Minarchism

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When talking about right libertarianism, many associated with those circles are quick to point out the varying factions of the libertarian movement. The simplest and most well known division is that between the anarchists and minarchists. On the anarchist side, you have your natural rights ancaps, consequentialist ancaps, agorists, individualist anarchists, free market anarchists, geo-anarchists, synthesis anarchists, and a myriad of other variations. On the minarchist side you have classical liberals, constitutionalists, paleolibertarians, Republican-lights, etc.

With the ground gained by the #BottomUnity campaign, a lot more right libertarians are getting exposed to left libertarianism and yet not understanding that there are just as many variations. While historically, libertarianism, especially in leftist circles, has been synonymous with anarchism, that isn't always the case. Most are familiar with the anarchist variations such as anarcho-communism, anarcho-socialism, anarcho-collectivism, anarcho-syndicalism, mutualism, anarcho-primitivism, individualist anarchism, and free market anarchism, but few are familiar with the traditions of left minarchism.

Yes, left minarchism is a thing and it can take many forms including democratic confederalism, Luxembourism, council communism, communalism, libertarian ecosocialism, democratic socialism, liberalitarianism, etc. While council communism and Luxembourism largely remain obscure and irrelevant tendencies in modern political organizing, especially in the so-called united states, we can look towards the autonomous territory of Rojava and groups in the so-called united states such as the Green Party, Democratic Socialists of America, Our Revolution, Justice Democrats, and the Democratic Freedom Caucus for examples of left minarchism in action.

The Green Party has been the staple leftist third party for a long time now. It was co-founded by many anarchists, including current GP presidential candidate Howie Hawkins, a self-proclaimed libertarian municipalist and anarcho-communist known for drafting the original Green New Deal and for his work with Murray Bookchin. The Green Party continues to boost anarchist voices to this day. Similarly to the Libertarian Party, however, not all party members or founders are anarchists. While the Green Party has always identified as libertarian, some veer on the more minarchist side, but instead of seeing the only function of the state as being those laid out in the constitution or even more minimally, the nightwatchman state (i.e. police, courts, prisons, and militaries), they often see the main function of the state to be welfare functions while usually advocating the abolition of police, prisons, and sometimes even the military.

The DSA is in a very similar boat to the Green Party in that it is a mixture of anarchists and minarchists on the libertarian end. They have more minarchist-leaning demsocs, Greens, and Berniecrats among their ranks while also having an explicitly anarchist Libertarian Socialist Caucus. The difference is that the DSA also has some decidedly non-libertarian members as well, including the old guard liberals who kept the organization going between its Socialist Party origins and its current incarnation. Many of these came from the Bernie movement after it began falling in line with the Democratic Party and endorsing every corporate candidate they put up while continuously bashing third parties. Thankfully most of them are being pushed out post-Bernie. Now the threats tend to be younger liberal-apologists and tankies. Despite their inclusion, the DSA still currently leans predominantly libertarian and has endorsed prison abolition, fossil fuel divestment, and drug and sex work decriminalization among other platform planks. They also have many amazing direct action campaigns, most famously their Gimme a Brake (Light) clinics they hold nationwide where they replace peoples' brake lights for free since broken brake lights are one of the number one reasons for people being harassed by the police while driving.

Our Revolution and the Berniecrat movement more generally is very similar in makeup to the DSA. You have everyone from more left-leaning liberal statist who believe voting and reform is enough to left anarchists focused towards harm reduction and outreach. While Bernie's policies themselves largely publicly lean social democrat rather than democratic socialist, many left minarchist types latched onto his campaign anyway due to his higher possibility of winning and position as the supposed harm reduction vote. In spite of his campaign being merely a watered down version of the Green Party or even true democratic socialist politics, he still has been a strong advocate against corporate welfare, mass incarceration, the drug war, mass surveillance, student debt, and environmental destruction, and has inspired others to run for office on even more radical platforms such as Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (AOC) who has called explicitly for prison abolition and the abolition of ICE.

The Justice Democrats, co-founded by AOC as an anti-corporate Democratic caucus, is one outgrowth of this effect. As such, it is not strictly libertarian but tends to attract libertarian-leaning individuals. The Squad, made up of AOC, Ilhan Omar, Ayanna Pressley, and Rashida Tlaib, have all backed each other in calling for states to stop using the police and court systems to force evictions and calling for a moratorium on state-owned utility shut offs and mortgage payments to the banksters during the COVID-19 pandemic, freeing of non-violent offenders from prison, and calling for the enactment of a UBI.

The Democratic Freedom Caucus tends to be more closely aligned with liberalitarianism of a classical liberal and Georgist influence. Typically they are for the decriminalization of drugs and sex work, ending foreign wars and reducing the military, strong privacy rights, gun rights, land-value tax, reducing mass incarceration, etc. but tend to lean more towards capitalist economics and tend to be fusionists similar to a left-of-center version of the Republican-lights. While largely removed from the rest of the minarchist libertarian left, occasionally you will have some overlap between them and the DSA/Berniecrat/Justice Democrat crowd over candidates such as 2008 Libertarian and 2020 Democratic presidential candidate Mike Gravel and 2020 presidential candidate Tulsi Gabbard who received the endorsements of Ron Paul, Gary Johnson, and Mike Gravel (who made a dual endorsement of her and Bernie Sanders after he ended his campaign).

While #BottomUnity may be easy for anarchists who all envision a voluntary stateless society regardless of their differing economic and political beliefs, left and right minarchists will likely have a much more difficult time reconciling their differences. And yet we have still seen glimpses

of unity. Ralph Nader and Dennis Kucinich historically formed alliances with Ron Paul on areas of civil liberties. Right minarchist libertarian Judge Andrew Napolitano has called Nader one of his favorite politicians and has praised and interviewed him on his show on Fox News. The Green Party and the Libertarian Party have worked together on ballot access and used to attend each others' events and have a lot more crossover during the early alliance of the Old Right and New Left that inspired the modern american libertarian movement. Murray Bookchin spoke at both GP and LP events, libertarian presidential candidate Russell Means endorsed Ralph Nader, etc. The LP's Libertarian Socialist Caucus is making inroads with the DSA's LSC. Hell, even left minarchist-leaning politicians such as AOC and Bernie Sanders sometimes find themselves fighting alongside the likes of Thomas Massie and Justin Amash.

It's a messy world out there and the fight against the corporate state ends up attracting libertarians of all kinds. From anarchist to minarchist, left to right, it's time we stopped strawmanning each other and genuinely learned about each others' politics and where we agree and differ and form alliances accordingly. If anarchists and minarchists on either side can put off their differences to form tactical alliances and left and right anarchists can do the same, then so can right and left minarchists to varying degrees. I'm not saying the alliance will not be without its pains and disagreements but I do think if we come to it with open hearts and minds, we can learn a lot from each other and find new paths forward which better fit the concerns and meet the needs of all libertarians on the path towards diminishing the size of the state and its control over our lives.

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