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An Anarchist response to Marxist-Leninists

On decentralisation

Khaleeji Syndicate

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A lot of the disagreements between Marxist-Leninists and anarchists ultimately comes down to a boring economic discussion on centralization and decentralization, and another equally boring discussion on national defense.

Marxist-Leninists largely believe in a command economy, one which is centrally planned from the top-down; whereas anarchists believe in a federal, horizontal model from the bottom-up.

Anarchists argue that the latter is more efficient, democratic and liberating – Marxist-Leninists tend to argue that it is inefficient, regressive and fragile.

As an anarchist, I don't necessarily disagree with critiques of decentralisation; as I also believe that it is a gradual, methodical (and circumstantial) process that can work better in some areas before they can potentially work in others.

That said – my response is that there is no correlation between decentralisation and inefficiency, and that “no central government” doesn't imply “no governance”.

In regards to decentralization in relation to national defense, there are two points worth noting.

1. The single most effective milita against US imperialism was decentralised.

“Although U.S. military officials insisted that the COSVN (Central Office of Southern Vietnam) existed, it was never found, despite exhaustive, resource-draining search campaigns by U.S. forces. It is unclear whether the COSVN ever existed at all, as the Viet Cong was notorious for decentralized guerrilla operations that were difficult to pin down or disable.”

2. Anti-imperialist Cuba also took steps towards decentralization, which only lead to rapid development in the past decades.

“In 2010, Fidel Castro, in agreement with Raúl Castro’s reformist sentiment, admitted that the Cuban model based on the old Soviet model of centralized planning was no longer sustainable. They encouraged the creation of a co-operative variant of socialism where the state plays a less active role in the economy and the formation of worker-owned co-operatives and self-employment enterprises”

Workers’ cooperatives is a form of decentralization that is workers-owned, which is in contrast to state ownership of the means of production.

As for decentralization in relation to the economy, voluntary federalism (of cooperatives, credit unions, councils, etc) has proven to be impactful, both in capitalist and left-wing nations.

1. This is allegedly evident in the town of Arrasate, which went from “one of the poorest” towns of Spain to “one of the wealthiest”.

It is also known as Mondragon, and their economy consists of 98 federated cooperatives.

“The lowest tier is now €16,000 a year (about \$19,400), which is higher than Spain’s minimum wage. Most people earn at least double that, plus they receive private health care benefits, annual profit-sharing and pensions. The system proved robust during the global financial crisis of 2008, followed by the so-called sovereign debt crisis across Europe. Joblessness soared beyond 26 percent in Spain. But in Mondragón, the cooperatives apportioned the pain through wage cuts and advance payments on future hours. Unemployment barely budged.”

That said, Mondragon isn’t without its flaws either – such as their heavy reliance on foreign companies/employees who aren’t federated into Mondragon.

However, in respect to its horizontal management on a local / internal level, this goes to show that a lot of what is often credit to centralized systems can also be achieved in federated, horizontal structures; if not more efficiently.

10% of Basque country’s GDP comes from cooperatives. It has the highest GDP per capita in all of Spain, and the second highest human development (HDI 2017) of all Spanish autonomous regions, which makes it comparable to the development of Finland.

2. In Emilia Romagna (Northern Italy), around 40% of the GDP is produced by Cooperatives. It’s also the region with the fourth strongest economy in Italy.

“Active people in working age are more than 70%, and the women activity rate is the highest in Italy. The unemployment rate is under 8% in 2015 with respect to the national average (12.8%).”

Users of Credit Unions (member-owned financial cooperatives) also report greater satisfaction than users of private banks.

In conclusion, such federations can still generate massive wealth, alongside fair wealth distribution, low unemployment, health care benefits, pension, direct democracy, all while withstanding a financial crisis; largely better than the rest of Spain, in Mondragon's example.

Mondragon is still largely flawed, but it is also perceived as an overwhelming success in respect to its decentralist, federalist management (within Basque, at least).

Overall, I agree with the sentiment of diversifying tactics, as opposed to orthodoxy and dogmatic commitment to ideology.

A lot of catastrophic outcomes are rightfully blamed on poor central planning as well, and my conclusion is that we should learn from the best and worst example of both systems.

Ultimately, my answer is that if we can maintain autonomy and social progress alongside modern societal amenities and guarantees – then why not?