Leeds Solidarity Federation
Reclaiming Liberty and Libertarianism
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therefore our right as the primary resistance to state and capitalist domination to take these words back.

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Conversely, it is a mistake of those 'collectivists' who disapprove of liberty (which they associate only with liberalism or childish idealism), to emphasise the collective above all else. This isn't because the collective is not of the utmost importance, but because it can be easily hijacked when everyone's voices are not given equal importance in the process of making decisions. In other words, an collectivist mindset without freedom can only lead to new forms of oppression, because the concept of the collective becomes too alienated from the individual. Suddenly its interests always mysteriously align with those of the new ruling elite — according, at least, to the ruling elite. By refusing to champion liberty as a virtue, you lose the democratic and conciliatory processes that make solidarity and collectivism so useful to participate within in the first place.

Thus, we need to understand that liberty and solidarity complement one another in our end goal of communism (due to the collective's ability to relieve the individual's burden) — but we must keep both in our methods too. We cannot submit ourselves to domination by small cliques of people, as we see among communists who seemingly take their characterisation of 'unfreedom' by the neoliberal state as a badge of pride. Nor can we submit to disorganisation, as we see among the (admittedly small) number of anarchists who take their characterisation as 'messy and useless' by the neoliberal state as an endorsement to be so. No, we need a movement with *organisation*. But it must be *self*-organisation by the collective, and not discipline enforced by an arbitrary, anointed minority.

So, because our goal is the liberty of communism, and because our actions should be imbued with this liberty found only through love and solidarity, we should call ourselves libertarians again. No rightwing pseudo-intellectual should chastise us for doing so, because no capitalist society today can truly claim to be 'liberated' — and this has been the case for over 200 years. Nor should any bootlicking excuse for a Leftist do so either, because the joy of liberty is ultimately what we ought to be fighting for in the first place. It is

state principles. But worldwide, neoliberal politicians make genuinely significant decisions about our lives under the pretense of 'liberty'. They use it to justify the false 'right' of your boss to oppress you at home and the false 'liberation' by the soldier abroad, as they expand and protect Western corporate interests. Both the statist neoliberal and the loosely 'anti-state' capitalist pose a significant challenge to the Left because of their malicious misuse of our language, and both need to be engaged with head-on if we are ever to succeed in our aims.

Liberty and the Left

So what is true libertarianism — or indeed what *should* it be? The short answer is that it should be the Left. From the first stirrings of the trade union movement in the 1800s, the most important aim of the Left has been liberty. Whether it was Karl Marx or Joseph Déjacque, Peter Kropotkin or even Vladimir Lenin, their ultimate goal was a communist society where all needs would be provided for. Thus, because when all our needs are provided for — and we are thus able to do as we want — there cannot be a better word for this state of affairs than "liberty".

In order for such a society to be brought about, we therefore need to put liberty at the heart of our thinking and our actions. As I mentioned at the beginning, this will only be achieved through a synthesis with solidarity. The mistake of the individualist (capitalist or otherwise), who refuses to view society as a collective, is to forget the value of solidarity. Because in solidarity, we act selflessly to benefit the collective — not least because we often receive an eventual reward from it anyway. Excessive individualism rots away our ability to unite around common traits and prevents us from fully understanding the altruism necessary to live contentedly: contrary to popular assertion, we would, and should, get a kick out of helping other people.

The words 'liberty' and 'libertarian' have become increasingly — and in my view wrongly — associated with the Right over the last few decades, especially in the Anglosphere with which I am most familiar. Ever since the writer and renowned crypto-fascist dickhead, Murray Rothbard, symbolically "captured" the terms from the Left in the 1960s, our view of them as a society has become increasingly tainted. It has been misused, not just by a fringe of American pseudo-intellectuals, but also by people in the highest echelons of neoliberal state power.

The true origins of the term 'libertarian' are communistic to their very core — it was coined by the anarcho-communist Joseph Déjacque as early as the 1850s to refer to his own views. Déjacque saw in communism the liberty that comes from having one's needs provided for. And indeed, 'liberty' also ought to be a proud part of the broader Left's vocabulary, equal only to 'solidarity' in importance. As such, we as anarchists ought to start calling ourselves libertarians again (without the need for further descriptors such as 'socialist' required) and reclaim the word completely from the Right.

The capitalist misuse of liberty

To the average person, even the more politically aware, 'libertarianism' invokes ideas of individualism, free markets and self-sufficiency — especially in a rugged, socially Darwinist sense. In less charitable terms, it has become associated with the 'freedom' to trample on others, as well as an objective 'right' to property and resources acquired and maintained through force (often that of the state they claim to oppose). Indeed, argue with any self-proclaimed 'anarcho-capitalist' and you will rapidly realise how disconnected they are from the extreme violence necessary to maintain the 'property rights' they fetishise. They will never admit that anything is unfairly distributed. They just prefer not to talk about it if they can

avoid it. Property to the 'libertarian' capitalist simply 'is'. It just exists, and that is that. We cannot question from where its legitimacy is derived, and we cannot interrogate the role of state violence in protecting it. We must simply respect others' 'freedom' to hold onto it.

This is where class struggle anarchists (and anyone else with more than a teaspoon of common sense) can easily begin to see holes in the 'libertarian' capitalist way of thinking, and realise that it is nothing but a series of comforting falsehoods to a group mostly made up of society's worst oppressors (it tends to appeal mostly to upper/middle class white men). Property, at its heart, exists as it does now solely with the legitimacy of the state. Even in 'free-market' neoliberal societies, private property is ruthlessly protected by state force, first and foremost. If any normal person asserts their right to rebel against injustice through property damage, these 'libertarians' side with not just property, but the state — entirely out of instinct. Again, we see their apparent commitment to freedom unmasked as a comfort to soothe their unease with their own oppressive tendencies.

'Libertarians' also fail to notice or acknowledge the obvious regarding corporate tyranny: your boss is not your friend, nor can they ever be because of their social and economic roles. The boss in a workplace functions on a small scale as a dictator might on a national scale; they have the right to hire and fire (often at a whim), thus being invested with the power to remove someone's livelihood at short notice. With this leverage, they can tell you to stand up, sit down, accept reductions in wages, or do things you aren't comfortable doing. The idea that any truly 'free' society could ever tolerate such a phenomenon is completely laughable, and demonstrates how shallow their commitment to freedom actually is.

The view of the capitalist 'libertarian' presented so far is a very American one, although it is of course a very Americanised subculture online even outside the US. However, this does not mean that 'libertarian' capitalism has not been culturally influential

among people who still admit to a belief in the state. Indeed, its influences on neoliberalism are apparent. For example, Sajid Javid, the former British Chancellor of the Exchequer, was known for lovingly reading his wife passages of Ayn Rand — she was another pseudo-intellectual who appropriated the language of freedom, most notably to justify the wealth of the wealthy. Interesting methods of flirtation aside, we have seen politicians as prominent as Boris Johnson using the UK's (and by extension, the US') supposed commitment to freedom and individualism as justification for lax rules around coronavirus. Johnson's bumbling has historic roots in Thatcher and Reagan's own misuse of 'liberty' — both of whom employed the concept to justify imperialist state terror like that of Pinochet in Latin America. Bush and Blair used it to justify the invasion of Iraq. The 'unfreedom' that their imperialism was pitched against were simply whatever they happened to oppose at the time, with no real deeper meaning. When we look at the results of it all, it goes without saying that no-one came out of it any freer than they were before.

Neither group have much to say about the injustice of inherited inequality, either. Through inheritance, people end up with more freedom (i.e. through greater wealth and thus spending power), merely because of who their parents are. You would also be hard pressed to find a neoliberal or a 'libertarian' capitalist with any kind of coherent anti-racist (i.e. anti-colonial) politics. A presidential candidate for the 'Libertarian' Party of America was even repeatedly abused online for showing even a moderate (albeit loose) commitment to the Black Lives Matter cause. The reason they have so little to say on it is because they simply cherry-pick the people for whose freedom they fight — that of the wealthy and privileged, whether they are of the wealthy themselves, or simply pathetically aspire to it.

American-style 'libertarians' are clowns at best and dangerous at worst. And we ought to note that many soon become fascists because of the flimsiness of their commitment to freedom and anti-