

Libertarian Communism and Democracy

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Democracy is one of the hottest buzzwords among leftists and socialists. Often, democracy itself is seen as an ideal to aspire to. This is the root of all “radically democratic” tendencies. Unfortunately, such an idea is commonly found among anarchists and libertarian socialists; the tendency to prioritize the *form* of democracy over the content of anarchism.

When I refer to democracy, I am not referring to the bourgeois liberal form of democracy, which I will refer to as *republicanism*, as it has been refuted over and over, right in front of our very eyes. While social democrats and democratic socialists continue to peddle bourgeois republicanism, most revolutionary tendencies are not under the illusion that republicanism and bourgeois democracy is a viable path to communism.

What instead will be critiqued here is the unquestioning adherence to democratic organizational forms that many revolutionary tendencies fall under. Gilles Dauve, in his *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Autonomy*, draws from many communist tendencies to critique the democratic form, despite his misunderstanding of anarchism.

The impossibility of democracy under class society

Any analysis of democracy must begin with its role in class society. Here, we define it as “the self-rule of the people,” whence we can already see the contradiction: there is no rule of the people; there are classes and struggle between them. In current liberal capitalist societies, the ruling class is the bourgeoisie. Democracy cannot exist under class society. Republican societies merely use democracy as a rationalization for the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie.

A communist society cannot wear the forms imposed by class society, such as the state, patriarchy, and even representative democracy. The Marxist-Leninist delusions of preserving these within a socialist society must categorically be rejected. Yet, democratic organization takes new forms under proletarian control, the council form for one. Organically-formed democratic structures would naturally arise in proletarian activity.

Proletarian democracy and its obsolescence outside of class society

Democratic organization arises out of proletarian activity. Here, we see our first major caveat: out of proletarian activity. The fetishization of democracy as an end cannot be tolerated. Would it be so that us communists stop our struggle because the proletariat votes against it? Of course, the support of the masses is vital to any revolutionary movement, but the primary task of communists is to defend the revolutionary program. By fetishizing democracy, we are liable to giving up our program to its whims and machinations.

And what validity does a decision gain from being approved by a majority? Does 51% automatically equal a good decision? The metaphysical reasoning behind the fetishization of democracy must be rejected as well. Such a numerical method is better suited for class society, where its members have different aims and goals, rather than a communist one.

Free association as the form that best preserves the content of communism

We, as communists, prioritize the content of communism over the form that it is achieved. Of course, content and form are intensely linked; hence why the seizure of state power is not a viable form for communism. By rejecting democracy, we reject the subordination of the communist program to the democratic form. On the contrary, we recognize that any content may only be meaningfully furthered by the free association of common aims and interests. As Dauve puts it:¹

Our problem is not to find how to make common decisions about what we do, but *to do* what can be decided upon in common, and to *stop or avoid doing* whatever cannot be decided upon in common.

[...]

Communism is not a question of finding the government or self-government best suited to social reorganization. It is not a matter of institutions, but of activity.

The essence of communism lies in the libertarian form of free and organic association. Imposing set democratic norms on the organic activity of the proletariat will only stifle it. The forms best suited for the struggle of the proletariat and the maintenance of the society that follows will arise from the necessities of association. In this way, free association is the only form that can preserve the content of communism; a forced association will result in meaningless compromise and inaction or the tyrannical imposition of one group over another. Neither of these outcomes is effective or useful for communists.

Beyond democracy, but not without it

Democratic organization continues to hold value when necessary; when organically invoked by proletarian activity. To simply reject any and all uses of democratic organization is foolish and falls into the same errors as vulgar democrats. Amadeo Bordiga emphasizes:²

...communism presents itself as a critique and a negation of democracy; yet communists often defend the democratic character of proletarian organizations (the state system of workers' councils, trade unions and the party) and the application of democracy within them. There is certainly no contradiction in this...

Democratic organization will still likely exist in a communist society when suited. It will certainly not be raised to an ideal but treated as a method that is useful for making decisions. By rejecting democracy, we are confirming the primacy of communism over the form it takes, not rejecting every use of democracy.

¹ Gilles Dauve, "Communism as activity," *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Autonomy*

² Amadeo Bordiga, "The Democratic Principle"

Lessons to be learned

The important takeaway is that the content of communism, the self-abolition of the proletariat, must be prioritized over the form that it takes. The form taken by communism will be determined by the free and organic activity of the proletariat.

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