

# **The Conquest of Sandwiches**

Usufruct Collective

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## Intro

Communism has been a crucial part of anarchist and libertarian socialist history: in fact the term libertarian was used as a political term by anarchist Joseph Dejacque who critiqued the politics of Proudhon from an anti-hierarchical and communistic perspective. Later on, a more fleshed out conception of communism became more and more common through large segments of the global anarchist movement to the point where it became the most prominent economic vision of anarchism. This communist turn happened relatively soon after anarchism began as a social movement. Libertarian communism has been theorized as a goal to arrive at, as something that could and should happen immediately after a revolution (or at least as much as possible after a revolution), and as something that should be prefigured in order to develop communist institutions, content, and relations.

The *Conquest of Bread* by Kropotkin is a great example of 19<sup>th</sup> century communist theorizing. And building off of Kropotkin's conception of anarchist communism, we can hopefully develop an even more holistic vision today that is updated through 1. over a hundred years of anarchist activity, history, and strategy Kropotkin never got to see 2. New historical, social, and technological conditions 3. Cutting edge social science and psychology 4. A reinvigorated ecological approach. It is a sad state of affairs that visions of a new society are so undertheorized and undervalued within many contemporary anarchistic circles in the USA and elsewhere. Despite *The Conquest of Bread* being written in regards to a very specific historical context, it stands out as visionary for our times— even more so than most attempts at visionary anarchist theorizing produced today (often by a longshot).

Clearly we should not want a blueprint that is so overly detailed that it suffocates the differentiation, experimentation, participatory action, plurality, and adaptation that is crucial to what a good society and roads towards it consists of; but we should want visions of a good society that can be fleshed out and applied to specific contexts— adapting to relevant variables while retaining specific universal features. Such broader visions of a good society should neither be too detailed nor too skeletal. Without a vision of a good society, and a conception of what the good consists of, how do we know what we should be doing, where we should be going towards, and how to get there? And when it comes to the question of how to get “there” (to a good society) and what “there” entails, it would do us well to think about how a libertarian communist economy could and should function. It is necessary but not sufficient to abolish hierarchical society; we additionally need to develop new ways to interface politically and economically to provide for the needs of all and to enable people to make decisions about what affects them and what they want to do on various scales. It is not enough for people to have knowledge of unfreedom and injustice in this world and a fiery passion to abolish such conditions and the will to act upon the above; People will and should inquire about what a good alternative political economy to the status quo is and how it would function— and it is necessary for revolutionaries to have some good answers to such questions, good goals, and good ways to get there. A libertarian communist revolution will not happen without sufficient prefiguration of new ways of relating, making decisions, forming institutions to provide for the needs and desires of people— as well as enough general education among people about how to do the above. Although a revolutionary development must be goal oriented, it ought to make good processes some of such goals to be developed— as well as make good ends developed within good processes. This is both because the processes themselves have

ethical value and are not merely instrumental and because on a strategic level forms of freedom are best developed through such prefiguration as the ends determine the means we ought to use.

Communism at least entails a moneyless, classless, stateless society where means of production are held in common, and distribution is from each according to their abilities and to each according to their needs. From such necessary features, one can easily and successfully argue that many attempts at communism—such as all of the alleged communist states— were/are in fact not communist. Libertarian and anarchist communism are approaches to communism that want to use horizontalist and anti-statist means to arrive at communism. Libertarian and anarchist communists want communist ends developed through self-management and infused with broader horizontalist and free form and content. Some, but not all, general approaches of and towards libertarian communism include communalism as a prefigurative strategy (and developmental end goal) and/or syndicalism as a strategy and means towards communism. Communalists are in favor of federations of self-managed community assemblies that develop communist practices and relations (and are also in favor of a communist society that includes such communal assemblies) through prefiguration and syndicalists are in favor of radical unionism aiming towards revolution and socialism (with a large amount of syndicalists additionally being communists).

There are also non-libertarian approaches—or more appropriately authoritarian or hierarchical approaches— to arriving at communism which have been shown to be disastrous failures such as parliamentary social democratic approaches and the various Leninist statist approaches. All social democratic and Leninist approaches towards developing communism have kept capitalism and the state rather than abolishing both. Both social democratic and Leninist approaches towards trying to arrive at socialist and communist conditions are thoroughly rooted in state power/hierarchical politics. Such hierarchical politics, to the degree that they are reproduced, continue class relations intrinsic to the state and inhibit socialist and communist relations. A prerequisite for communism is the socialization of means of production. For means of production to be socialized they must necessarily neither be owned privately by capitalists nor by a political ruling class via the state (Goldman 1987). State approaches towards communism did not develop socialist relations, a precondition for communism, let alone communism in addition to socialized economics. Horizontalist politics—to the degree such politics are reproduced— at least develop their own necessary features (direct democracy, free association, non-hierarchy, etc.) and are by extension are consistent with and conducive to socialist ends. Although revolutionary anti-state movements towards communism have been imperfect, have made tragic mistakes at times, and have not yet developed global communism, such revolutionary anti-state movements towards communism have not created the extent of the failures and compromises and violations of fundamental human freedoms (and violations of basic socialist principles) that state approaches towards communism have produced. And on a positive note, libertarian and anarchist communists have developed and participated in thousands of self-managed organizations, countless actions towards a better world, as well as several revolutions with anti-hierarchical and communistic features—the overall movement spanning millions of people and all continents.

## **Communism and Communalism**

Communist production, reproduction, economic decision making, and implementation could technically be done through multiple kinds of ways of arranging socialized production (social-

ized production as in means of production held in common and governed by self-managed collectives of some kind). Communalism ought to be the complimentary political economic form of communism. Communalism is for communalized economics and means of production and not just socialized production. Communalism properly distributes means of production according to needs of communities and persons without putting policy making power in regards to communal economics in the hands of relatively privatized sources of power. Communalization is a way of gathering all who need, use, and contribute to the commons to govern the commons at multiple scales. Such communalized economics can only be communal if managed directly by horizontal communal assemblies and networks thereof. Such community assemblies and federations thereof would have constitutions, bylaws, shared processes, practices, and goals in harmony with the following qualities: direct democracy, non-hierarchy, free association (participatory activity of each and all), mutual aid, distribution according to needs, and co-federation. Within such a practical framework, decisions about common economics would be made by such communal assemblies deliberating about how to meet aggregate needs. People would deliberate in such assemblies and pool needs, ideas, knowledge, alternative proposals, abilities, volition, skills, resources, and technology together to make decisions in relation to solving common problems or developing common projects. Participatory, horizontal, and directly democratic decision making processes would exist on a plurality of scales—from communal to intercommunal to broader co-federated scales. Such communal assemblies would have working groups and embedded participatory councils that implement decisions and self-manage within the bounds of the policies made by communal assemblies and members thereof. Such a process harmonizes self interest and social interest, is rooted in cooperative conflict and deliberation for decision making, has a form and a content that guarantees self-management of each and all on every scale to the degree it develops, has maximal political transparency, allows for decision making and coordination on a plurality of different scales, allows for function redundancy, etc. and is not internally limited by the profit motive or positions that give people power over others (and what is entailed by the maintenance of such power over others). Additionally, such an approach does not put the economy at war against itself by pitting different relatively private sectors against others.

## **Communist Economics**

Communist decision making would start with finding out the general needs and economic desires of people and then move into how such needs and desires can be met through self-managed arrangements (Crump 2014). Materials, means of production, technology, and overall societal labor/work needed to meet aggregate needs under specific conditions can be calculated to inform decision making and implementation. Deliberation and relevant economic information would inform horizontal assemblies so they can change and tweak plans as needed and as relevant changes happen. Such economic calculation can be assisted by computers and cybernation, but even when that happens all policy making power would be in hands of people directly. Dialogue augmented by cybernated systems can give people relevant information for economic decision making. Surveys, numbers from last year's production, resources available within ecological regeneration rates, new technology, what people want to do, new needs, new desires, new luxuries, and new ecological factors (and more) can assist the iterative planning done by communal and intercommunal assemblies. It is important to note that even though such overall societal eco-

conomic calculation can help assist with self-management of communal economics, communism “consists in consuming and producing without calculating the exact share of each individual” (Kropotkin 1901). Under contexts of scarcity or disaster—such as the revolutionary development of communism out of terrible conditions— there would be priority production and distribution schemas where needs take priority over relative luxuries. As such communist institutions and content develop, mutually equitable access to luxuries would be integrated as needs of all or otherwise things people have access to. Such a communist economy would ideally develop into a full post scarcity economy (which would still retain the necessary features of communism, but also be a “higher phase” thereof). Despite lack of actuation, there has been a technical potential for a global post-scarcity economy for decades (Bookchin 2004).

Once overall needs are aggregated, communal assemblies, federations thereof, and embedded councils would devise plans to meet such needs and desires. There would be back and forth dialogue within and between assemblies of communal and intercommunal associations until common plans and policies are arrived at (which would continually get updated by participatory planning processes). Ideally, general and relevant propositional and practical knowledge would be sufficiently generalized among communards. Embedded councils, working groups, or relevant experts within or outside of specific communities can be thoroughly consulted to help round out overall knowledge communards have so they can make more informed decisions. After deliberation, political economic policy making power would be retained within horizontal participatory democratic communal assemblies with an aim towards full agreement with a fall back to majority votes within free association of persons— in harmony with the minimal norms, rights, and duties of libertarian socialist practices (Bookchin 2007). Implementation of policies would be self-managed by those who agree to implement such policies (Kropotkin 1892). Embedded councils and rotating delegates of communal assemblies would be mandated by and instantly recallable to the assemblies that they are a part of.

External motivation is not required to incentivize the labor, work, and actions that people sufficiently want to do because of the nature of the internal motivation for such activities. Internal motivation to help others and live in a good world would go a long way towards meeting aggregate needs and creating a high quality of life for people. The lived practice and spirit of mutual aid in tandem with necessity and desire would provide motivations for individuals and communities to meet common needs. A new culture based on care, reason, freedom, creativity, virtues, mutual thriving etc. would both help to bloom and bloom from a self-managed society. There are features besides goodwill and internal motivation that can be structurally built into political, economic and social forms to both generate such internal motivation to help others and to catalyze greater assistance and participation in reproduction of daily life. In a libertarian communist society, there is no structural ability to accumulate hierarchical decision making power, hierarchical positions, hierarchical means of production, or hierarchical access to fruits of labor, work, and action. Therefore economic thriving of any individual in such a communal economy—to the extent the form and content of such an economy are actuated in fact— would only be meaningfully possible through the thriving of a common sphere (either through developing cornucopian conditions or sufficient approximations thereof). A horizontalist and communist political economy harmonizes self-interest and social interest by making common thriving a precondition to individuals enjoying a good material standard of living and quality of life. Initial volunteers and agreements made between people to help chip in can let people know what labor and work would be leftover to meet overall needs. Arduous and toilsome labor leftover can be

largely automated or partially automated (Bookchin 2004). It is technically possible to automate the complete production of houses, automobiles and work simpler than such feats. Given current technological conditions, it would require relatively low labor and work input to actually meet baseline needs of all. Intercommunal and co-federal political economic associations and agreements can help with meeting needs of various locales. If there is leftover labor and work needed to meet the minimum of a common plan to meet people's needs, people can then make additional rounds of volunteering and through deliberation, democracy, and free agreement find out how to share the rest of what is needed to reproduce daily life and provide for desires beyond such a minimum or otherwise update the plan. This could look like collective agreements among specific volunteers and/or community agreements and/or cultural norms to help with some kind of needed work (deemed as needed by communal assemblies and facts of the matter of what is needed to reproduce daily life). Communal associations may opt for sortition and rotation for various kinds of labor/work required for meeting people's needs. More arduous and less desired labor and work that cannot be automated that are needed to reproduce daily life can be shared in some agreed upon way where the burden is lessened. Summarizing many of the above points: In a libertarian communist society, labor and work needed to reproduce daily life would be self-managed at every scale as well as: made more pleasant, infused with play, automated, partially automated, shared, and rotated. The above approach would be adapted and tailored to various dynamic communities. Overall, this would lessen the per capita amount of labor and work needed to reproduce daily life as well as transform it into a horizontally managed process and even a joyous one. Labor and work not related to meeting people's needs that people do not want to do will not get done (along with labor and work that serves no positive social function), and the world will be all the better for it. "Communism guarantees economic freedom better than any other form of association, because it can guarantee wellbeing, even luxury, in return for a few hours of work instead of a day's work," (Kropotkin 1901). Freed from toil, people will have drastically more time to do what they want to do. Far from merely basking in lack of activity, people will engage (and have the means to engage) in various practices they enjoy or want to excel at and by extension enrich the cornucopian, ecological, philosophical, scientific, and artistic dimensions of the world in the process.

In a communist society, all persons would have rights, and guaranteed access in fact, to the means of existence and necessities (food, water, dwellings, bathrooms, energy, clothing, health-care, education, public transportation etc.), means of production (including communal fields, factories, and workshops), common spaces and infrastructure, means of artistic expression and hobbies, and means of participatory politics (horizontal communal democracy). Additionally, people would have access to common resources that are produced at free distribution sites. When there is a relative abundance of specific goods, people can take what they need from the cornucopia, and when there is scarcity of a specific kind of good, people can get together to make that kind of good abundant or otherwise ration such goods in mutually equitable ways for those who need and want them (Kropotkin 1892). As various gradations of post scarcity conditions emerge, what used to be considered scarce luxuries under more scarce contexts would be made into guaranteed necessities or otherwise goods people have access to (Kropotkin 1892, Bookchin 2004). Whatever the scale is of communal economics and self-governance—from block to neighborhood, to city, to intercommunal associations, etc.—there should be access to the means and fruits of such political economic processes to all who need and use them (and the fostering of the abundance that enables such conditions to flourish towards well-being and luxury for all).

Library based access centers can help such a process by enabling more functional use value with less overall resource use and labor/work input. A cultural and material shift away from gratuitous personal acquisition towards an access-abundance of various library goods can help meet overall needs and help usher in a post scarcity economy. Strategic use of library access centers can contribute towards giving everyone a good material standard of living and alleviate people from a lot of needless production (and even alleviate people of all the upkeep and space that having one of every item they occasionally use takes up). Despite the many advantages of making various kinds of goods into library goods (or with library-access options), other goods (both kinds of goods and specific goods) of course make more sense as personal possessions than as library goods (and people should of course have rights and access in fact to such possessions given they are not gratuitous to the point of creating structural violence or otherwise inhibiting what should be guaranteed freedoms of others). On top of libraries for various goods, communalized tool libraries make a lot of sense for various tools people want access to that they rarely use. And additionally, a digital commons and the means thereof would enable access to an untold amount of tools, applications, media, resources, and information to be made readily available to all. Such a digital commons can help supplement and develop a post scarcity economy in conjunction with common means of production, communal access to the fruits thereof, and communal infrastructure (including, supplemented by, and not reducible to a robust library access sector).

Sustainability protocols can be streamlined into the process of decision making and production. Policy about various protocols would be in the hands of horizontalist associations. The following are examples of sustainability protocols: not using fossil fuels, using green energy, using recyclables when possible, design in built recyclability when possible, reusing and designing in built reusability when possible, upcycling waste when possible, finding other resources for various functions when there are shortages (creating redundancy), use of regenerative materials and technology when possible, increased durability when possible, ephemeralization (providing more functions with less resources) when desirable, localization when possible and desirable, library based access systems when needed/desirable, etc. However, there will be incommensurability between at least some of the above criteria sometimes. Such conflicts will occur and deliberation and democracy can be used to resolve such conflicts and make decisions consistent with a guaranteed minimum of horizontality and self management on every scale. Assemblies using such protocols would not be about “maximizing efficiency” of all sustainability criteria, but instead be rooted in making sure the minimal freedoms of each and all (and the means thereof), varying degrees of cornucopian conditions, and ecological flourishing persist and thrive. Some specific technologies that make sense as liberatory technologies for the current time period include: solar, wind, wave, tidal, and geothermal energy, energy efficiency methods, mass public transit, recycled materials, reusable materials, “up-cycling” a lot of what would otherwise be waste, regenerative materials, library based access systems, organic gardening and agroecology, reforestation, biochar, open collaborative design, computerized calculation, digital commons, modular design, and automation of arduous and undesired labor and work. The specifics of liberatory technology will change and develop as new relevant variables emerge. Such liberatory technology can only be meaningfully put into practice through liberatory political, economic, social institutions and relations that enable potential liberatory technology to be developed and function (Bookchin 2005).

A communist economy would not JUST be about mere production of products (artifice of some kind) but about meeting needs more broadly. Reproductive labor, that which reproduces daily life, would be integrated into an overall political economic process. Meeting needs would not



be through mere production of artifice towards meeting needs, but also through communalized reproductive labor such as growing food, cooking, childcare, teaching, healthcare etc. Communal gardens, communal kitchens, spaces for collective food projects, communal childcare, communal education facilities, communal healthcare, and the means of recreation would help meet needs and integrate reproductive labor as an essential and foundational feature of communal and intercommunal economic life and would be cared about as such. Such labor would become a self-managed and shared practice without hierarchical rule nor gendered divisions of labor. What is needed to reproduce daily life never absolutely disappears but it can be infused with freedom and the constitutive means thereof. Communal reproductive labor and productive work would both be crucial features of a horizontal political economy, both aiming towards meeting needs of each and all and developing the freedom of each and all (and the means constitutive thereof) as well as practices and projects entangled with the above.

In a libertarian communist society, political economic organizations— including communal reproduction, production, and distribution—would be decentralized and co-federated. The virtue of such decentralization would be the right kinds of decentralization, in the right ways, in the right contexts, for the right ends, in tandem with other features that enable such decentralization to be rounded out. Such a virtue of decentralization has decentralized and federated decision making, power, and planning from the bottom-up through horizontalist participatory associations. Such right kinds of decentralization of the economy enable political economic assemblies to exist at scales that are easy to deliberate within and self-manage (which can in turn easily scale out into confederated forms and networks), enable redundancy of functions within and between multiplicities of locales in such a way that fits people's needs and preferences (creating more resilience when it comes to disasters and emergencies and everyday life), enable greater degrees of self-sufficiency, and provide various ecological benefits. Such a decentralization would also blend town and country: infusing each with good/desirable functions of the other as well as creating mutualistic relations between more urban and more rural associations. Additionally, decentralization of political economic organizations into multiplicities thereof (as needed and desired) enables people to find communities that make sense for them, allows people to use relevant local knowledge to solve problems, and enables people on local scales to utilize informal social relations, approval, and disapproval to supplement upkeep of the commons. Despite various benefits that localization can have, there are many contexts where considerations come into play that make intercommunal and confederated economic decision making and planning into something that makes more sense for multiple reasons such as: 1. That which affects multiple communities should be decided by multiple communities as various decisions are not just about a single block, neighborhood, town, or city 2. To pool needs/abilities/volunteers/resources/technology/ideas/proposals together to solve problems and develop projects on multiple scales 3. To provide for needs and desires when local scales are not absolutely self-sufficient (which they rarely are) 4. To reduce overall labor/work through mutual support and assistance on an intercommunal scale. 5. As an extension of choice and freedom of intercommunal associations to undertake joint projects. 6. To uphold responsibility and commitment towards other communities and towards forging the right kind of interdependence between communities. The above are examples of reasons why intercommunal decision making and planning can make sense in various contexts for various functions compared to mere localized approaches. Decentralized and Co-federated planning and economics enable the benefits of non-local scales without the cons of centralized power over and above horizontal collectives. And such co-federation is a desideratum beyond mere ne-

cessity as the right kind of decentralization is not about absolute self-sufficiency but the right kinds of self-governance and self-sufficiency in tandem with radically egalitarian ways of organizing interdependence. Such a mutually interrelated and multitudinous political economy enables people to associate in various communal associations, embedded councils, working groups, and varied social groups that fit their dynamic preferences— enabling a radical differentiation and pluralism in harmony with non-hierarchical freedoms and duties.

The responsibility of each to contribute to the flourishing of the commons (where the commons in turn helps the flourishing of each) can be combined and organized through decentralized associations that federate outwards. The scale of such units can range by needs and desires of persons involved, but can be as small-scale as a block (for example). By having such decentralized associations, dynamic collective units are human-scaled, have specific loci of decision making and responsibilities in addition to both formal and informal ties between people who need and utilize the commons. The internal and external interdependence of decentralized and federated associations—along with the goal orientation of achieving common goals and solving common problems (in conjunction with a process orientation in harmony with self-management, the means thereof, and other universal freedoms)— helps enhance overall solidarity, contribution efforts, and resiliency. The above helps to avoid the problems of unmanaged commons as well as problems that can arise where responsibility is diffused in such a way where not enough people act upon it. And on top of having features that deal with such a problem that can come with vicious kinds of dispersed responsibility, such a decentralized and federated form and content positively disperses responsibility among persons and collectives in such a way that enables not only radical function redundancy, but also a qualitative responsibility of each towards the participatory activity of each and all and the means thereof (including access to means of existence and production).

Elinor Ostrom’s rules for governing the commons provide criteria for how a common sector can function well (Ostrom 2021). Even though her politics differ in crucial ways from libertarian communism, many of the overall principles and practices for managing the commons that she outlines can strengthen libertarian communist praxis (Libertarian 2013). And although not stated until now, the above approach of libertarian communism satisfies Elinor Ostrom’s 8 rules for governing the commons: It has clear and horizontal processes/practices/nomos/decision making, planning, and rules, it matches rules governing commons to local conditions (while also retaining specific universalist features), it ensures that those affected by decisions can modify them, it aims towards the commons being respected by others (through a focus on global revolution as well as defending the commons against hierarchical forces), it develops ways for people to hold each other accountable to rules of the commons without resorting to hierarchical strata and without hierarchical security forces, it has ways of dealing with rule violations as well as accessible dispute resolution (via free association/disassociation, self defense and defense of others, breaking up fights, diffuse social disapproval, and dispute resolution via mediation), and has responsibility for governing common resources in nested tiers from lowest level up to the entire interconnected system.

And although this essay is mainly about visions of a good society and how libertarian communism can function, the following is a brief sketch of some reasons as to why it should exist (note that each of the following premises are themselves conclusions to fuller arguments that can be found elsewhere):

Given:

1. the ethical necessity of self-management of each and all and the means thereof on every scale– thoroughly infused within political economic form, content, decision making, implementation, as well as everyday life.
2. access to means of existence and production are necessary means of self-management
3. that self-management of each and all on every scale and the means thereof includes a gestalt of features including direct democracy, non-hierarchy, free association, co-federalism
4. the objective potential for and history of radically different kinds of institutions and relations (including radically egalitarian and hierarchical ones)
5. the potential for and positive effects of the flourishing of the right kinds of mutual aid– including cornucopian conditions created by sufficient mutual aid
6. the history of and potential for common politics and economics and various institutional features that enable the flourishing of such a common political economy
7. that such a commons would be a ‘cooperative game’ with win-win potentials and interests
8. the potential for, positive effects of, and intrinsic features of cooperative conflict and deliberation as part of decision making processes
9. the positive social health effects of abolishing structural violence– including less violence, less abuse, less unmet needs, less adverse childhood experiences, less mortality, less addiction, more social trust, and more happiness.
10. the varied needs, abilities, and preferences people have
11. that any individual contribution to the economy exists in a broader social and historical context in which the labor/work/action of others makes any such contribution possible
12. the myriad of different ways communist economics can function well in the face of various predictable and unpredictable dilemmas without sacrificing the minimal features of communism
13. the goal of a good quality of life for all a good material standard of living for all
14. the goal of less per capita labor and work needed to reproduce daily life
15. the potential for wise sustainability protocols,
16. the potential for liberatory technology, automation of toil, and a post scarcity economy
17. the problems of centralized power in tandem with the goal of coordination within and between groups, function redundancy, adaptation to local variables, degrees of self-sufficiency,
18. that market economies distribute resources hierarchically and arbitrarily

19. the incentives of market economies to competitively grow or die and maximize profit in competition with others,
  20. intrinsic ethical problems of wages and commodified necessities
  21. the intrinsic ethical problems of non-communist alternatives to markets (be they right wing calls for traditionalism and/or tributary modes of production, or even left and anarchist notions of artificial markets and “collectivist wage systems”)
  22. the ecological necessity of abolishing hierarchical society.
  23. the social ecological potential for the reconstruction of society along free and ecological lines
- A libertarian communist society is possible and would enable the flourishing of freedom, the means thereof, overall happiness, ecological flourishing, virtue cultivation, development of good rights and responsibilities, and activities and practices entangled with and contributing to the above.

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