

Introduction: Toward a More Unified Libertarian Left

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In this introduction we briefly sketch out some of the similarities between Marxism and anarchism, particularly around the nexus often called “libertarian socialism”. We argue that two contemporary trends make this a particularly good time for these kinds of bridge-building projects. First, with the economy in crisis and Leninism largely discredited, people are looking for alternatives to capitalism and state socialism and libertarian socialism provides examples of visions that are socialist, but not *statist*. Secondly, with the recent surge in *anarchist studies*—academic work rooted in anarchism—it makes sense to show some of the connections between Marxist (an already accepted perspective in academe) and anarchist theory. Finally, we map out the specific contributions in this collection of essays. [Article copies available for a fee from The Transformative Studies Institute. E-mail address: journal@transformativestudies.org Website: <http://www.transformativestudies.org> ©2010 by The Transformative Studies Institute. All rights reserved.]

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INTRODUCTION

Much has been made of the rifts between Marxism and anarchism, which are both often caricatured as two opposing traditions. Indeed, if one is to step back and take a look at the similarities, they are striking (to say the least). Both traditions were born out of the socialist movement. Therefore, both call for the abolition of capitalism and the creation of a new society based on socialist principles. Both, in their most consistent forms, see ordinary working people as the agents of social transformation and recognize the need for a revolutionary break with the existing society. Why, then, the near-constant juxtaposition of the two great revolutionary traditions as if they are hostile and opposing theories?

This is, perhaps, an overstatement of the problem. Many revolutionaries and scholars (and those who have their feet in both of those worlds) have noted the deep connections between Marxism and anarchism. Many have also articulated a nexus between the more libertarian forms of Marxism and its descendents and various forms of anarchism, most notably, perhaps, Chomsky (see, for example, Pateman 2005; Chomsky 1970)—often referring to it as “libertarian socialism”—an older formulation that has variously described anarchism or a broad umbrella for any anti-state theory of socialism from below. Some have even suggested synthesizing the best from both traditions (Lynd and Grubacic 2008), though this project has certainly not been without its critics (see, for example, Anarcho 2010).

We believe a great deal can be gained from the kind of bridge-building highlighted above. Indeed, with capitalism in crisis the world over, rather than continuing the sectarian impulses that see the world in bounded and bordered ideologies, we propose taking the best from a variety of theoretical perspectives. As revolutionary alternatives continue to emerge and develop as arguably more desirable and sustainable than the dominant, neo-liberal capitalist model, and as material conditions create possibilities for seeing those revolutionary possibilities through, it becomes more and more important for radicals to help create *class* conscious movements and programmes rather than the highly *sectarian* movements more common today. Broadly speaking, it is our belief that it is through the creation of theoretically broad social formations that a revolutionary movement—or perhaps a “movement of movements” (Mertes 2004)—is possible. This is not to present ourselves or the authors herein as “class reductionists.” To the contrary, we promote discussion around new visions of “class consciousness” that consider, for example, the intersectionality of race/class/gender/sexuality (Collins 2000), and nuanced con-

cepts of class and class-based organization, such as the “multitude” that emerged from the anti-globalization movement and autonomous Marxists in Italy—even if in the final instance, we might not see completely eye to eye with these theories (Hardt and Negri 2000, 2004). Indeed, we join anyone who has been involved in, or even paying attention to radical movements of late to suggest that the (far) left is obviously hindered by its own divisions. As a partial result, alienated workers and the unemployed in the U.S. are more easily and successfully organized by their rulers, owners, and moral entrepreneurs than by effective unions or political collectives of the black and red varieties. It is difficult to argue with the suggestion that in many ways we have become largely irrelevant in the conscious day-to-day lives of the so-called “rank-n’-file” worker. This—not simply the intellectual development of scholarly theory—is the motivation of our work here: to begin conversations toward a more organized and united front against capitalism and other connected forces that bring our species (and others) closer and closer to social and ecological collapse.

On the ground, we suggest that it might be a particularly good moment for projects such as this. With the fall of the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc countries, the direction of Leninism and vanguardist approaches to bringing about socialism seem all but confirmed as a slow road to state capitalism at best—a direct bridge to Stalinism and totalitarianism at worst. After over a century of voting ostensibly “socialist” parties into power in the European nations, the necessity of revolutionary approaches seems apparent if we really want socialism in any meaningful sense. That said, it would require a facile and ill-considered dismissal to suggest that this confirms anarchist positions on the state and critiques of Marxism *as such*.

Indeed, there is a long history of left-wing, libertarian, and anti-state Marxisms (and Marxist ideological descendents) not rooted in the anarchist tradition that call for a socialism built by workers and not a Party—and not a *state*. As early as 1904, Luxemburg (1935) criticized Lenin’s interpretation of Marxism for arguing for a highly centralized Party that would, in her view, dominate instead of embody the working class. Council communists like Pannekoek (e.g. 2003) and Mattick (e.g. 1978) outlined a Marxism that was opposed to the state and Party formations from the early to mid 1900s. And many of these articulations of Marxism were apparent in the New Left movements of the 60s, particularly in Paris during the May ’68 uprisings and in the journal *Socialisme ou Barbarie* (which included such Left luminaries as Cornelius Castoriadis, Jean-

François Lyotard, and Guy Debord—who later went on to found the Situationist International).

In the academy, Marxism has played a central role in social sciences and had a place at the academic table (albeit often relegated to self-referential ghettos). Marx's work is known as the central root of "conflict theory" in the social sciences, and various Marxisms are part of the regular reading list of any social science graduate program. Not so with anarchism, which is most typically ignored, or in some cases taught as Marxism's lesser-known, theoretically unsophisticated cousin. This has been changing as anarchism has made a resurgence in revolutionary movements around the world. In fact, some scholars have suggested that anarchism is the major existing revolutionary current (see, for example, Graeber and Grubacic 2004).

Scholarly journals, like *Anarchist Studies* or *Anarchist Developments in Cultural Studies* have sprang up as peer-reviewed collections of anarchist scholarship. Various collections of anarchist-specific scholarship have been released by major academic presses (e.g. Amster, et. al. 2009, Purkis and Bowen 2004, Jun and Wahl 2009) just in the past 5-10 years. Additionally, books have been put together as collective suggestions on anarchist scholarly methodology (Shukaitis, Graeber, and Biddle 2007). Finally, collections of anarchist scholars, such as the European *Anarchist Studies Network* (<http://anarchist-studies-network.org.uk/>) or the *North American Anarchist Studies Network* (<http://www.naasn.org>) have formed to promote anarchist studies generally, and to facilitate the collective development of an anarchist scholarship.

Given this constellation of both *movement* and *academic* moments (and the many spaces that overlap between these two spheres), we offer this grouping of essays attempting to build bridges between Marxism and anarchism. Again, our suggestion is not to simply, uncritically synthesize the two traditions. Nor are we offering this grouping of essays as pieces that we, as editors, necessarily agree with. Rather, we present these essays as provocative documents that we, as engaged scholars and organizers, see as useful for sparking a much needed dialog on how Marxism and anarchism might be viewed and employed as complimentary, rather than opposing, traditions—particularly within the nexus of *libertarian socialism*.

ON THE SELECTIONS PRESENTED HEREIN

We begin with Christian Garland, who outlines precisely that nexus of libertarian socialism. Garland focuses on the concept of *autonomy*, ar-

guing that within Marxism there has always been a tradition that stresses autonomy in two forms: One, in the form of the exploited and oppressed acting as their own agents—on their own behalf. And two, this autonomy manifests in the form of a prefigurative force that anticipates its own desired future. Thus, he argues for an *anti-politics* embedded in anarchism and Marxism, and examines the overlap between these two perspectives based on this self-defining and self-creating agency in social practice.

Next, Christos Memos examines the Marxist/anarchist divide in the context of the recent Greek uprising. Greece has provided an interesting modern laboratory for libertarian social movements, with an uprising in Greece based in these autonomous traditions. After police shot and killed an anarchist teenager in the Exarchia neighborhood on December 6, 2008, riots and occupations spread throughout the country, often referred to now as the “December Uprising”. Memos uses this shifting terrain to examine divides between anarchism and Marxism, as well as developing points of agreement based in on-the-ground praxis in the Greek uprising.

Abraham DeLeon takes on the subject of space in radical social change. More specifically, he argues that anarchism has failed to fully take into account the conceptual and applied importance of space in its project. Further, he employs post-structuralism as a bridge between the anarchist and Marxist traditions in his analysis. Demonstrating how space is implicated in creating and maintaining docile bodies and subjectivities, DeLeon argues for combining neo-Marxism, anarchism, and post-structuralism to effectively address the issue of space and how we might reconceptualize radical political theory and practice in light of insights provided through examining the combination of these three traditions. DeLeon’s work is an excellent example of how, as already mentioned, new formations of class based movements and collective class consciousness might be conceptualized given contemporary theoretical developments and social contexts.

Our final article, by John Imani, makes a proposal for what a post-revolutionary economy might look like. Imani’s proposals are unique in a couple of regards. First and foremost (and in line with the idea behind this journal edition), he tries to combine what he sees as the best and most pragmatic of Marxist and anarchist principles in developing this vision. Secondly, he bases his perspective on his practice in the Revolutionary Autonomous Communities, shifting between the theoretical and the experiential in his formulation. Though Imani does not present this essay as a flawless “plan” for a post-revolutionary future, we found it important for the broader dialog being initiated in this edition of *Theory in Action*. It is not controversial to suggest that, where far left political

theory and philosophy has received a great deal of attention, few have attempted to develop (in sufficient detail) how a post-capitalist economy might actually, plausibly “work”—particularly drawing from anarchism and Marxism together. We hope that his paper, like the others here, might be useful in this needed collective endeavor.

As useful summary thoughts on the notion of Marxism and anarchism as relatively complimentary in theory and revolutionary praxis, we also present emerging scholar, Abbey Willis’s, review of the previously mentioned work of Lynd an Grubacic (2008): *Wobblies and Zapatistas*. In her review, Willis illustrates some important critical reflections on such a synthesis, while also pointing out the strengths of their work, and the possibilities it might inspire. Specifically, Willis asks us to consider what the notion of “synthesis” implies and how we might think differently about political *identity*.

Theory in Action is a unique, *peer reviewed*, scholarly journal in that it encourages forays into revolutionary social change. We are happy that we could contribute to the life of this unique journal, and its host, the Transformative Studies Institute. But in a project such as this, we are humbled as we remind ourselves of the words of Marx: “The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways. The point, however, is to change it.” It is our hope that intellectual work looking into building bridges between Marxism and anarchism likewise leads to bridge-building in practice. The editors and authors of this special edition are not just scholars. We are also advocates of resistance to the dominant social order who believe that radically different futures are possible—even necessary. In the project of transforming our world, and transforming ourselves, we dedicate this collection and humbly offer it up as a larger project for discussion and critical debate on how we might better bring about these transformations.

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