



**Everybody wants
to go to heaven,
but no one wants
to die to get there**

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If you ever want to make a good case against communism to a worker, tell her that communists want the following things:

- Everyone is unemployed
- No one has any income
- Democracy no longer exists
- No one can own anything

The paradox of communism is that it appears to involve conditions that are absolutely unacceptable to any rational person. Who in their right mind wants to give up having a job that pays a decent wage, the right to vote and control over means of production? And why would anyone who claims to fight for social emancipation stand for these sorts of things.

Yes, you can try to clean this shit up by saying, “Oh, I don’t mean everyone is unemployed; what I meant is no more wage labour”, but people are not dumb. They know that when you write “*No more wage labour*”, what you really mean is “*100% unemployment.*” They know that communists want to put everyone out of a job — which, if you communists ever succeed, will kill the economy and, in most scenarios they can imagine, plunge us all into poverty.

And don’t say you don’t want this, because communists don’t think people should even be paid for their labour power.

So tell me this: How are people supposed to pay their bills if they don’t get paid for their labour power? Do you just think we can all just stop paying our bills? And then what? Who will build the roads? Who will grow the food? What if I get sick and need medical attention? Who will educate my kids?

Confronted by these sorts of questions, most communists I have read or talked to immediately begin trying to show how their imagined communist utopia will work — they build imaginary systems, or cite limited experiments, like these ideas mentioned by Alan Nasser in a recent article:

“We have real-world examples that can serve as a starting point for a working model of a democratic socialist economy. Mondragon leaps to mind. For about twenty-five years Yugoslavia under Tito had an economy in which workers leased productive facilities from government, organised production themselves and determined the distribution of the firm’s revenues between wages and reinvestment in the firm. In After

Capitalism (Rowman and Littlefield, 2011), David Schweickart offers a refined and realistic model of what a practicable democratic socialist economy would look like, based in part on the Yugoslav experiment. Gar Alperovitz (What Then Must We Do?, Chelsea Green, 2013) and Michael Albert (Parecon: Life After Capitalism, Verso, 2003) have also contributed to the discussion. There's plenty of grist for our mill."

The question raised by Nasser's examples are two-fold: First, if Yugoslavia was so successful, where is it today? Second, why, in all of examples cited, do we never clearly see a path to the end of class, labour, property and the state? Because they can never move beyond certain definite limits, these systems always collapse into some new state, some new method of coercing labour, and some new form of property.

The paradox of communism

This is what I call the paradox of communism: Everything communists stand for appears in this society as a catastrophe to existing society. This paradox is not simply a product of the lack of imagination of folks in present society. To go from a situation where everyone has to sell their labour power to communism under the premises of present society implies an ever bigger shitload of people can't find work. Communism may be the end of wage labour, but getting to the end of wage labour implies ever increasing unemployment, competition to sell labour power and social disruption. And if people can't find work, they will turn to people who promise to create work, not those who argue we can live without it.

What distinguishes communism from politics is not the realisation that the end of wage labour is a good — which it never appears to be empirically — but that it is inevitable. So 100% unemployment may not figure as a benefit for the working class, but it is the inevitable result of processes taking place beneath present society.

It cannot be avoided.

This is what Ben Noys calls the "radical or quasi-Marxist 'cunning of reason'" — the idea that in the capitalistic mode of production unemployment is the most likely path to communism. Noys' argument is simply the academic version of the reaction any worker would have if you told them communism aims to get rid of their job. And Noys' reaction to this process is exactly what we should expect: A demand for immediate political intervention to stop communism from happening.

Nobody in their right mind wants communism because it naturally emerges in the form of a huge social catastrophe. It is like the B.B. King saying, “*Everybody wants to go to heaven but no one wants to die to get there.*” Everybody wants to live without the need to sell their labour power and the daily grind of wage labour, but nobody wants to be unemployed.

However, so far as I know, with the exception of a few old patriarchs, everyone who went to heaven had to die first. So it would appear that we are destined to fight against the emergence of communism until all means of fighting are exhausted. Thus fight is a profound political reaction to the terrifying prospect of unemployment and operates on a level of consciousness that is not easily combated. The reaction of the entire society, and of both classes in society, is to prevent the emergence of communism at all costs.

This political reaction, however, operates on two distinct levels that should not be conflated. We need to deconstruct the fear communism inspires in the working class.

Deconstructing fear

If we go back to volume 1 of Capital, Marx begins his analysis of the capitalistic mode of production by distinguishing between the two aspects of the commodity: exchange value and use value. I believe the reaction of the two classes is each related to a different aspect of this initial contradiction.

Although the political reaction of both classes is the same, each class expresses in its politics a fear regarding the impact on their material conditions of existence of different aspects of commodity production. With regards to the capitalist class, the reaction is tied to the commodity as an exchange value; however, with regards to the working class, its reaction is tied to the commodity as a use value.

Which is to say, the capitalists experience the end of wage labour as the end of the production of value and surplus value; while the working class experiences the end of wage labour as an actual mortal threat to its physical existence, as the threat of starvation.

The distinction between the two classes here must be emphasised because the end of wage labour may indeed be the end of commodity production, but this does not imply the end of both value and use value production. While value production comes to an end, the production of use values does not and cannot come to an end.

And this distinction is also critical to our consideration because the production of use values does not in any way necessarily depend on living labour. Use values can be produced in huge quantities with only a negligible quantity of living labour incorporated into their production.

At the political level of the social reaction to the idea of 100% unemployment, both classes have the same reaction: They will both fight against the emergence of communism with all means at their disposal. This implies that, at the level of politics, communists of all varieties will never be anything but a marginal political force. To the extent communists aim at the end of wage labour, this aim cannot have anything more than a marginal political expression. Communism can only be the aim of society to the extent the production of use values can be separated from the production of exchange value.

Theoretically the separation of the production of use values from the production of exchange values can only begin once the productive activity of the working class is not solely engaged in production of exchange value. This requires society has free disposable time to engage in productive activities that do not and cannot in any way aim at producing exchange values.

In other words, the separation of production of use values from exchange values is possible only when free disposable time of society becomes the prime source of use values. I think this cannot happen until almost all (or at least the largest part) of the personal time of individuals in society is free disposable time. The larger the quantity of free disposable time society possesses, the more likely this free time will itself become the most important source of material wealth.

The problem we face at present is that the production of material wealth cannot be separated from the production of value, because the working class has very little time of its own to engage in any activity that is not premised on value production. This cannot be fixed by demanding the state create jobs, handout basic income, raise the minimum wage or other measures very popular on the Left right now. It cannot even be fixed by more advanced ideas like market socialism, cooperatives and even Soviet style central planning.

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