

A reply to “Capitalist Praise For Anarcho-Syndicalism”

Anarcho

October 13, 2008

Jeremy Sapienza, an “anarcho”-capitalist, wrote an essay on anarcho-syndicalism. This is a reply to it and a critique of his main assumptions and arguments.

Sapienza states:

“I have been studying left-anarchism for quite a while now, and I’ve been impressed with the strong anti-statism of many of the factions. I have a lot of respect for the voluntary anarcho-socialists, who truly would let everyone do their own thing, form their own communities, as long as they were allowed to create their own and not be disturbed. Their true goal is to destroy the State, and I could hardly condemn them for that.”

In other words, he is impressed with actual anarchists! Given that anarchism (what he calls “left-anarchism”) aims to create a social revolution from below, after which people would create communities based on their own preferences, then he simply is saying that anarchists are just anarchists.

The difference between anarchists and “anarcho”-capitalists is, of course, how they view communities so formed. For the anarchist, the nature of these communities determine whether they are anarchists, not their voluntary nature by themselves. After all, a community run on Fascist lines is hardly anarchist. Equally, the current system of competing nation states are also voluntary (no one forces Jeremy to live in the USA). That does not mean that the current system is anarchist.

Therefore, to aim to destroy the state is not enough. If the current federal state system in the US was abolished, leaving an independent collection of states that would not be an anarchy.

“I have been pretty partial lately, though, to the ideas of anarcho-syndicalism, but not as a defining political/economic theory. Allow me, for a minute, to expound my theory. Just as we advocates of a stateless society strictly relate anarchism to government, we can so relate syndicalism to the market economy.”*

Of course, “strictly relat[ing] anarchism to government” is a common “anarcho”-capitalist ploy. Restricting anarchism to their definition is useful as it allows them to ignore the whole of the anarchist tradition and its ideals. This is useful for an ideology with no links to anarchism to try and

worm its way into the movement. Sadly, of course, anarchism has never been “strictly” limited to opposition to government (after all, the first self-proclaimed anarchist book was Proudhon’s **“What is Property?”** and Godwin’s work was hardly uncritical of private property). From the start, anarchists have opposed capitalism as well. Little wonder, then, “anarcho”-capitalists try to limit anarchism to such a narrow definition (interestingly, this is precisely what many Marxists also do in order to monopolise the socialist tradition).

In a footnote he states:

“Most of you are familiar with the debate between left-anarchists and anarcho-capitalists. The left insists that we are not ‘true’ anarchists because we’re capitalist boosters, and anarchism is defined as the absence of any type of hierarchy or domination. We say that they are full of shit, and that anarchism is easily defined as the simple absence of political government.”

So, rather than address the issue at hand, the “anarcho”-capitalist resorts to insults and the parroting of their beloved definition! Very convincing. While the anarchist points to the rich tradition of anarchist theory and practice over 150 years, Jeremy replies by, well, not replying.

Jeremy continues:

“For example, ‘anarcho’-syndicalism (to use the tactics of the anarchist left) is a contradiction. This from Anarcosindicalismo: Basico:

‘Contrary to the hierarchical Organization and authority of the State-Capital, and its repressive apparatus, anarcho-syndicalism poses its Anti-Organization. This involves a process, in which decisions are made at the base, in which the people participate, in which there is no leadership (or it is very limited), there is no repression, and there exists full liberty and equality in the exchange of ideas, opinions, and initiatives. Anarcho-syndicalist organisation resembles that of the State-Capital as little as possible. It is thus an anti-organisation when compared to the authoritarian model existing nowadays.’

He comments:

“Apart from the annoying use of noun capitalization reminiscent of German, and the ridiculousness of the tendency to equate capital with the state, this is so far consistent with the use of the term ‘anarchism,’ since this in no way assumes that coercive force has been or will be used to make sure that this worker’s ‘paradise’ is established or protected.”

Why is it “ridiculous” to equate capital with the state? The similarity between the state and capital (private property) can, ironically, be found in the works of leading “anarcho”-capitalist Murray Rothbard. According to Rothbard, the state “*arrogates to itself a monopoly of force, of ultimate decision-making power, over a given area territorial area.*” This is obviously a form of rulership. However, he also argues that “*obviously, in a free society, Smith has the ultimate decision-making power over his own just property, Jones over his, etc.*” [**The Ethics of Liberty**, p. 170, p. 173] Which,

to state the obvious, means that both the state and property is marked by an “*ultimate decision-making power*” over a given territory. The only “difference” is that Rothbard claims the former is “just” (i.e. “justly” acquired) and the latter is “unjust” (i.e. acquired by force). In reality of course, the modern distribution of property is just as much a product of past force as is the modern state and so the difference does not exist.

As can be seen, “*the ridiculousness of the tendency to equate capital with the state*” is no such thing. If anything is ridiculous, it is Jeremy and his inability to see the obvious similarities between private property and the state. Anarchists, however, do not have this problem. Looking at Proudhon, the first self-declared anarchist and inspirer of both Kropotkin and Tucker, we find:

“Capital ... in the political field is analogous to government ... The economic idea of capitalism ... [and] the politics of government or of authority ... [are] identical ... [and] linked in various ways... What capital does to labour ... the State [does] to liberty ...”
[quoted by Max Nettlau, **A Short History of Anarchism**, pp. 43–44]

Little wonder Jeremy wants to “*strictly*” define anarchism so as to exclude the actual opinions of anarchists! What is capitalism? A system in which the worker sells his or her labour to gain access to the means of life (the land, workplaces, and so on). By selling their labour, they also sell their liberty. The boss tells the worker what to do, when to do and so on. This, of course, is identical to the relationship of the state to the citizen. As such, rather than being “*ridiculous*,” the anarchist position accuracy reflects reality. Can we be surprised, given this, that the first self-proclaimed anarchist book (Proudhon’s **What is Property?**) argued that “*property is theft*” and that “*property is despotism*”?

As regards the use of “*coercive force*” to create anarchism, it should be noted that the current owners of the land, capital and the state have their property due to “*coercive force*” conducted in past generations and maintain their positions of power by use of “*coercive force*” against the dispossessed. As such, it is hardly anti-anarchist to try and abolish the “*coercive force*” and power of the state and property owners – it is an act of liberation.

Let us take an example. In 1920, under anarchist and syndicalist influence, workers and peasants all across Italy occupied their workplaces and the land. They simply ignored the property owners and their state enforced property rights. The movement was non-violent in nature, as to be expected as it simply involved workers taking over what they already used but did not control. After the movement was betrayed by the socialist trade union leadership, the employers started to fund the fascists (in effect, a private army). The fascists attacked the anarchist, syndicalist, socialist and trade union organisations and individuals, crushing all under a wave of violence (15 years later, fascists in Spain tried to do the same thing but where stopped by the anarcho-syndicalists of the CNT). Rather than the anarchist and syndicalist revolution being “*coercive force*,” it was the employer counter-attack to maintain their property rights and power which was violent (i.e. marked by “*coercive force*”). It would be interesting to see it explained how ignoring authority equals “*coercive force*” while authority’s violent reaction does not. This shows the weakness of Jeremy’s argument.

Jeremy continues by quoting the CNT again:

“The CNT (Confederación Nacional del Trabajo, National Work Confederation) is a union, a confederation of industrial union branches...[T]he CNT health workers form

the Union of Public Health, without distinction to professional categories [instead of dividing different professions within healthcare into distinct unions]. This structure was adopted at the Sans Congress in 1918. It was agreed on because it was seen as the most practical in struggles with capital...

“[A] union decides its issues by means of the Union Assembly. The assembly is its highest decision-making body, attended directly by members. It is not mediated by outside committees, delegations, etc...

“All mandates are revocable at anytime. The assembly is free to demand the resignation of the officers if it wishes. The duration of a term is two years, with possible re-election for one more year as maximum. It is required that officers be rotated...”

He argues

“Do you see the tendency of these ‘anarchist’ unions toward authority? It all seems to oddly resemble a...state!”

The state is marked by delegation of power. As the CNT makes clear, committees are mandated and are recallable by the members of the unions. This is hardly a state, but it is an organisation. If “anarcho”-capitalists equate organisation with the state, then they have to apply this to every group and conclude that the capitalist company is also “*an authority*” (which it is!). Simply put, Jeremy simply fails to indicate how groups will make decisions. Will groups not exist? Obviously, they will. If so, how do they make decisions? By being subjected to a boss (as in capitalism and the state) or by self-management (as in anarchist unions)? Only the latter is anarchist, of course, which is why anarchists are anti-capitalist.

It also seems strange that “anarcho”-capitalists have no problem with, say, multi-plant capitalist firms yet scream “authority” when democratically run firms federate. Apparently having an autocratic unelected boss rule over a multitude of workplaces and workers is no worry for freedom but the moment co-operatives join together via elected, mandated and recallable delegates then freedom is in danger! Why democratic procedures rather than dictatorial ones are the greater threat to liberty is not explained.

Jeremy continues:

“If you read on, you’ll see what I mean. I found the following concise little quote here.

‘In place of capitalism we want a free socialistic economic system in which the workers and peasants directly control the land and factories, and use these resources to produce for the benefit of all. In place of the State, we want to manage our own affairs through grassroots workplace and community councils, united at the local, regional, national and international levels. We call this system ‘anarchism’ or ‘stateless socialism’ or ‘libertarian socialism.’

“Right.

“When you add in the fact that all workers, as union members, have to pay union dues, I’m sorry, but I don’t see anything ‘stateless’ here. In fact, it seems to be organised exactly like a political government, complete with decision-making bodies whose decisions are enforceable, organisational hierarchy, and taxation.”

So under “anarcho”-capitalism there will be no decision-making bodies? How will a group of people make decisions? There are two options. Either the group makes their own decisions (self-management) or someone else does. As Jeremy thinks that groups making decisions for themselves is “*a political government*” then it can only mean that the groups are subject to the decisions of someone else (probably the boss). Now, it seems a strange definition of “anarchy” which rejects self-management as “*political government*” while arguing that a hierarchical, indeed dictatorial, relationship (someone telling the group what to do) is not government. Which, of course, shows the mess you get into when you “*strictly*” define anarchism as being just anti-state!

Now, looking at the relationships between the self-managed groups, anarchism argues for free federation. As the CNT argues, the assemblies and their councils unite at the appropriate levels. Now, is Jeremy arguing that under “anarcho”-capitalism groups will be barred from freely uniting with others? If so, is that not an authoritarian imposition on free association? What business is it of his to stop groups of workers uniting with their fellows if they so desire?

And, of course, he talks about “*organisational hierarchy*.” Now, according to his previous definition of anarchism, “*strictly*” defined as anti-state, this should not be an issue with him. After all, anarchists reject capitalism because, as he notes, we consider anarchism to be “*defined as the absence of any type of hierarchy or domination*.” This, he colourfully informed us, means we are “*full of shit*.” Now, when he is attacking anarchism, he uses this “*full of shit*” definition to define the state!

He is trying to have it both ways. If the state is marked by “*organisational hierarchy*,” then so is the capitalist company. If the state is to be opposed because of this, then so must capitalism. Both are marked by “*decision-making bodies whose decisions are enforceable*” (the boss, the government) and “*organisational hierarchy*” (with the boss/government at the top holding the power). As such, he proves the anarchist case against “anarcho”-capitalism. I thank him.

As regards the CNT, I would simply point out that as decisions flow from below and power rests in the members, it is not a hierarchy. It is an organisation, of course, but a non-hierarchical one.

He ends as follows:

“It doesn’t seem that anarcho-syndicalists want to destroy the State so much as they want to become it.”

Ah, yes, of course, the secret aim of all anarchists is exposed! We want to become the State! Yes, that explains why we urge working people to manage their own affairs directly, to get rid of bosses, because we want to become bosses ourselves... Highly illogical, but if a logical argument is impossible, it is best to suggest that the aims of your opponents are suspect. In that way, you can simply ignore the arguments of anarchists — after all, they are secretly plotting nasty things and so you can discount everything they say! And the fact that anarchists say the exact opposite of what Jeremy claims just shows how devious they are!

After proving the anarchist case against “anarcho”-capitalism, Jeremy continues:

“So, rather than have the left-anarchists use the term ‘syndicalist’ exclusively for their own state-building purposes, let’s also use it for the simple concept of worker ownership of the means of production in a capitalistic, stateless society. Not of all the means of production, but as an ideal situation for many distinct industries.”

Actually, syndicalism has a specific meaning. It comes from the French for revolutionary trade (labour) unionism (**syndicalisme révolutionnaire**) and, in English, syndicalism simply and unsurprisingly means “*revolutionary labour unionism*.” The term has a long history, closely linked with anarchism. So, not intent on redefining anarchism to suit his aims, Jeremy also seeks to redefine syndicalism as well! It is nice to see that neither language nor history nor theory will get in the way of “anarcho”-capitalism appropriating words. What next, will Jeremy redefine the word “wet” to mean “dry”?

Ignoring the sad and pathetic slander of anarchists aiming at “*state-building*,” we are instantly struck by the lovely contradictory idea of “*worker ownership of the means of production*” being “*capitalistic*.” Now, clearly Jeremy has redefined capitalistic as well as anarchism and syndicalism. Capitalism is marked by workers not owning the means of production. It is this fact which generates wage labour, the defining characteristic of capitalism. As such, workers owning the means of production signifies a non-capitalist society! But he would know that, if he bothered to read anarchist or Marxist theory on the matter. As Marx, echoing Proudhon, put it: “*Let us suppose the workers are themselves in possession of their respective means of production and exchange their commodities with one another. These commodities would not be products of capital.*” [Capital, vol. 3, p. 276] But, then, perhaps Marx did not know what was and was not “*capitalistic*”?

And looking at the history of the anarchist, wider socialist and labour movements, we discover that the idea of worker ownership of the means of production and the exchanging the produced goods has not only existed in theory for a long, long time, it has been applied in practice too. The practice has a name, the co-operative movement and has existed for over two hundred years. The theory has come in various forms and has included such notable thinkers as Robert Owen, William Thompson and Pierre-Joseph Proudhon. Proudhon’s idea was simple. Working people would form mutual banks (credit co-operatives) in order to finance the construction of co-operatives which would, due to their greater efficiency and the interest free loans from the mutual banks, reform capitalism away by competition.

Was this idea “*capitalistic*”? Not according to Proudhon (who called himself a socialist), nor Marx (who also called Proudhon a socialist), nor Bakunin, nor Kropotkin. The name of his theory? Mutualism. Since Mutualism (like the anarchism and syndicalism) is an explicitly anti-capitalist set of ideas, I can understand why Jeremy has either never heard of it or declined to use it (after all, it may make people read Proudhon and that would only make them aware of the anti-capitalist nature of both his ideas and the anarchist movement he helped found).

Still, what did Marx know about capitalism and anti-capitalism? Or, for that matter, Proudhon, Bakunin or Kropotkin? Let the last word rest with Murray Rothbard. After the fall of Stalinism in Eastern Europe, he proclaimed that, in the face of popular support for a market based system of co-operatives, ownership was “*not to be granted to collectives or co-operatives or workers or peasants holistically, which would only bring back the ills of socialism in a decentralised and chaotic syndicalist form.*” [The Logic of Action II, p. 210] Rather, the state should ignore the popular will and issue shares to workers in an enterprise (assuming the relatives of the old capitalists did not return). But, then, perhaps we can ignore him as he was only an “anarchist” in the sense that Marx and Engels were: political action to capture the state, which would then abolish itself! “Marxo-capitalism”, like private-statism, is a far more accurate description of Rothbard’s ideology than that oxymoron “anarcho”-capitalism.

And, we must add, why would workers ownership not be applicable for all the means of production? I wonder what Jeremy would say if someone said, “*yes, liberty is good not for all*

aspects of life"? He would reject the claim out of hand. The same applies to the economy. Why is liberty in production not applicable everywhere? And if it's not applicable in all aspects of the economy, then surely it is not applicable in all aspects of life?

He makes a comment:

"So shall I coin the term? How about capitalist syndicalism?"

Capitalist revolutionary labour unionism? Obviously Jeremy has little concern about the meanings of words. Perhaps we can present some other oxymorons? How about "anarcho-capitalism"? Or "libertarian capitalism"? Or "capitalist socialism"? Or "socialist capitalism"? They make as little sense as "capitalist syndicalism."

After amusing us with his ignorance of words and their meanings, Jeremy gets serious:

"Now, I would think that a company run on the principle of capitalist syndicalism would create a more efficient system of production than one run as many are now, from the top down, and with all property owned and controlled by one person or family."

Now, an area of land (property) run in a top-down way, controlled by a few people... That sounds familiar. What does it remind me of.... Oh, yes, the state. Jeremy, yet again, proves the anarchist case that "anarcho"-capitalism is not anarchism. Here we have him implicitly pointing out the similarities of the state to capitalist property. Thank you.

After proving the very thesis he claims is "full of shit", our Jeremy continues:

"For any anarcho-capitalists out there that would take me to task on this, let me remind you: it is we who are always making the argument that people work more efficiently when they work for themselves one hundred percent of the time, as opposed to much of their time for the state. How much more efficiently and productively would you work if you not only got to keep your entire wage, but got to share in the profits, too? Employee theft would probably become non-existent, not to mention that waste itself would be drastically reduced, the only exceptions being in the case of accidents."

Which, of course, is the conclusion of all genuine socialists (anarchists, Marxists, syndicalists) and so on. Yes, capitalism is marked by workers working for someone else (the boss). They do not work for themselves and so do not gain the full product of their labour. This means that workers should organise into anarchist unions and abolish capitalism along with the state. As such, Jeremy has proved yet another key idea of anarchism. Thanks again!

Little wonder he worries that his fellow "anarcho"-capitalists "would take [him] to task on this"! It's an anarchist analysis and points to an anarchist solution. It cuts to the heart of "anarcho"-capitalism, exposing it as being outside the anarchist tradition.

He decides to paint a picture of how this non-capitalist regime could develop:

"In the situation I envision, I will create an imaginary tire plant. A bunch of workers in various tire plants around the country decide they don't like working for the Man anymore, and possibly via the internet they find each other, and with their pensions and/or savings cashed in, they could raise enough capital to start their own tire plant."

Ignoring the usual technological fix, I am struck by the total lack of concern about reality. After all, a tire plant can be a large investment. Would the workers have enough money to start such a large investment? What about the competition? Is the market marked by big business, which could use its resources to crush their attempts by cutting costs and driving them out of business? I could go on – anyone interested can consult the history of the real co-operative movement and discover the problems such attempts face in a real capitalist economy rather than an imaginary one.

After inventing a perfect example, Jeremy continues:

“Most likely, they would elect supervisors, or they could be chosen by how much money was invested. Whatever way this is decided, the workers would have full democratic control over their investments and their work.”

But this obviously has “*decision-making bodies whose decisions are enforceable, organisational hierarchy, and taxation*”! It is statist! What happens if this co-operative (and why not use the proper name rather than invent sad oxymorons?) decides to link up with other co-operatives in a federal union? More of the same! Oh my god! Its anarcho-syndicalist statism all over again!

You see the problems which develop when you start playing with the meanings of words!

He continues his story:

“They would hire administrative workers into ‘wage slavery,’ such as accountants, secretaries, janitors, marketing personnel, etc. Or these jobs could be restricted to investors as well. This could be the company of the future, with workers brought together through modern communications and common interest.”

Ignoring the usual sad technological fix, what do we make of the idea of workers employing other workers? Well, obviously it strikes at the heart of the co-operative vision. If, as Jeremy insists, wage labourers are less efficient than free workers, then this applies within the co-operative itself. If there were wage labourers then they would be subject to the “*decision-making bodies whose decisions are enforceable*” and the “*organisational hierarchy*,” which is an example of statism, do not forget. As such, Jeremy yet again allows us to show that capitalism is not anarchist and never can be. Little wonder that Proudhon explicitly argued that all members of a workplace would be equal members of the co-operative from the moment they join. He was well aware that freedom was for all, not just property owners.

As regards the “*common interest*,” how is this decided upon? By group decisions and so we are brought back to the importance of what Jeremy calls the “*full of shit*” argument of anarchism, namely the importance of “*the absence of any type of hierarchy or domination*.” Clearly, rather than being irrelevant to the definition of anarchism, it is essential. As Jeremy himself proves.

Jeremy continues disproving his own argument:

“The workers would guarantee that their tires would be the best quality possible, because it is their livelihood and their capital at stake. The secretaries would be overly nice and sweet and patient with customers, since they have the same motivation to keep them coming back. More customers means more money in the pockets of everyone. This leads to a general increase in quality and profitability.”

Which, of course, is why we must abolish capitalism and replace it by anarchism. Thanks Jeremy!

He continues:

"We can expand the example beyond one tire plant. There could be worker-owned factories making all different parts and products, trading and selling these goods to other 'commune companies' or directly to retail stores (who in turn could be employee owned). There is no limit to the possibilities of capitalist syndicalism!"

Why invent words when there is a movement which already does this, namely the co-operative movement? And this movement has been supported by anarchists and other socialists as an alternative to capitalism for over 200 years. It is a shame that Jeremy knows so little about the subject he is trying to discuss.

Equally, co-operatives have been pointed to by Proudhon, Bakunin, Marx and other anti-capitalists as being non-capitalist and containing the seeds of the system which will replace capitalism. Proudhon, for example, argued that the "*workmen's associations ... are full of hope both as a protest against the wage system, and as an affirmation of reciprocity.*" *Their importance lies "in their denial of the rule of capitalists, money lenders and governments."* [The General Idea of the Revolution, pp. 98–99] To discuss co-operatives and not take into account the socialist perspective on them simply shows an unawareness of co-operatives, their history and their socialistic basis.

And what if these co-operatives decide to federate together into local, regional, national and international councils? Would Jeremy denounce this process as statist? Yet this is exactly what most anarchists argue for. If co-operation is so productive, then co-operation on wider scales will also be more efficient and productive. Unless Jeremy plans to impose a law upon the future which bans such free federation and free association, he will have to admit that the anarchist and anarcho-syndicalist vision is not at all "statist" as he previously claimed. Equally, he will also have to denounce multi-plant and multi-national capitalist organisations as being statist as well, although I'm sure he will not.

He ponders the rights of workers:

"Don't the workers of the world deserve to share in the prosperity brought to us by advanced technology? I would hope for a world where the line between the capitalist and the worker is smashed to pieces, not just blurred or softened."

Ignoring (yet again!) the worship of advanced technology, we have to state that Jeremy is again simply presenting anarchist conclusions. Yes, why should there be two classes in society? Why should workers sell their liberty to a boss? Can workers not be free individuals within the production process, managing their own affairs? As Proudhon argued:

"either the workman... will be simply the employee of the proprietor-capitalist-promoter; or he will participate... [and] have a voice in the council, in a word he will become an associate.

"In the first case the workman is subordinated, exploited: his permanent condition is one of obedience... In the second case he resumes his dignity as a man and citizen... he

forms part of the producing organisation, of which he was before but the slave; as, in the town, he forms part of the sovereign power, of which he was before but the subject ... we need not hesitate, for we have no choice... it is necessary to form an ASSOCIATION among workers ... because without that, they would remain related as subordinates and superiors, and there would ensue two ... castes of masters and wage-workers, which is repugnant to a free and democratic society.” [Op. Cit., pp. 215–216]

Such a society would be socialist, as Proudhon, Kropotkin and other anarchists and socialists argued.

Having proven the case for anarchism and the case against “anarcho”-capitalism, Jeremy continues:

“But the socialist anarcho-syndicalists scoff at this idea. Why? Because they aren’t really interested in bringing the common worker up to the level of the capitalist. They want to tear the capitalist and entrepreneur down to the level of a poor wage labourer, and then rule them all in their little mock state.”

The fact that the anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists say nothing of the kind just shows how devious they are! I mean, why let little things like facts get in the way of a good rant...

I am inclined to think that Jeremy makes such comments for three reasons. Firstly, it makes him feel big and important. Secondly, he knows that its not true and needs someway of putting people off the ideas he has just, unknowingly, proven to be attractive. Thirdly, he does not understand the ideas he is attacking and so hides his ignorance by insults.

And to just to state the obvious, anarcho-syndicalists do not aim to “tear the capitalist and entrepreneur down” by themselves. We want “*the common worker*” (as if any unique individual could be considered “*common*”!) to organise and join with their fellow workers (which includes anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists) to expropriate the means of production and destroy the state. In other words, to free themselves by their own efforts. Anarchists do not see liberation coming from above, by the actions of a few enlightened individuals on behalf of the rest. But Jeremy should know that if he has, as he claimed, read anarchist and anarcho-syndicalist theory.

Given that Jeremy states the opposite of what anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists argue for we can surmise two possibilities. Firstly, that Jeremy is deliberately misrepresenting our ideas. Or, secondly, that Jeremy has the ability to read minds and so knows what anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists are “really” thinking (whether this amazing ability is the product of magic, natural ability or “advanced technology” is left up to the reader to decide). I will leave it up to the reader to determine the most likely solution.

He continues:

“Anarcho-syndicalists don’t want to see the market economy survive democratisation of the workplace, because it would severely limit ‘class struggle,’ and therefore, their reason for being.”

It would be interesting to see in what anarchist book he discovered that particular argument. Then again, maybe it’s not in any anarchist book (see how devious we are!). To refute this nonsense, it is simple. Firstly, once the workplace is democratised then classes would not exist. Everyone would be a worker and there would be no capitalists. Secondly, most anarchists oppose

a non-capitalist market economy (not the same thing as capitalism) because of the benefits of co-operation Jeremy has expounded upon. Thirdly, even a non-capitalist market economy has drawbacks in its operation, draw backs which I'm sure that Jeremy has never given thought to. For example, competition between co-operatives could see a race to the bottom developing in which co-operative members work longer and harder hours simply to survive. Anarchists agree with Stirner when he argued that it results in labour "*claim[ing] all our time and toil*," leaving no time for the individual "*to take comfort in himself as the unique*." [The Ego and Its Own, pp. 268–9]

Simple really. Now, you may not agree with the analysis and consider it flawed, but intellectual honesty demands that you present the actual arguments and refute them, not invent some spurious straw man argument and inflict it on others.

Jeremy argues:

"They couldn't 'agitate' because all the worker/capitalists would be telling them to go screw."

Syndicalism is revolutionary labour unionism. Workers in a co-operative do not have bosses and so a union is a bit redundant. But this would be obvious if Jeremy actually knew what he was talking about. An anarcho-syndicalist union may let members of a co-operative join it, of course, but the focus is to organise those workers who actually need the benefits of solidarity and organisation to defend their liberty against hierarchical authority (i.e. those who are wage workers and have a boss).

He continues his inventions:

"I have seen (I can't remember where, I searched forever it seems for a quote) anarcho-syndicalists say that they wouldn't let syndicalism be used in the capitalist system."

Anarcho-syndicalists aim to apply syndicalism (revolutionary labour unionism) in the capitalist society. It is the key aspect of their ideas! See the confusion that results when individuals start to define their own meanings of words!

What Jeremy is, in fact, saying is that many anarcho-syndicalists have concerns about co-operatives being formed under capitalism. While most anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists are not opposed to the idea of creating co-operatives, they argue that it will never reform capitalism away. As 200 years of the co-operative movement shows, we have a point. But why let such facts get in Jeremy's way? Why should be bother to actually address the real arguments of real anarchists?

Equally, it would be interesting to see Jeremy's explanation why co-operatives (in spite of their well documented higher efficiency and productivity) have not displaced capitalist industry. After all, the capitalist market is meant to select the most efficient means of production by the process of competition. Yet here we have a more efficient means of production not replacing a less efficient one. Perhaps Jeremy will simple wave his "advanced technology" wand and so solve this problem? Or, then again, he could look at the reality of the capitalist market and how it hinders the development of co-operatives and workers' control. But the latter option would, of course, involve him questioning his god (capitalism) and so we doubt he will.

He continues his straw man argument:

“They say that they aren’t for simple worker control of the means of production, they want those means to be used only for the ‘good of society.’ Whatever the hell that is. Obviously to be determined by them, and not society, which expresses what it wants through demand (purchasing).”

If Jeremy actually bothered to read anarchist and anarcho-syndicalist works, he would soon discover the facts of the matter. Simply put, most anarchists are against even non-capitalist markets as the market does not provide for all individual needs and wants. For these it does provide for, it does so simply based on effective demand and generates externalities which impact on the individuals which make up society. However, suppose it is easier for Jeremy to slander anarchists than address their actual arguments.

He continues:

“How would the anarcho-syndicalists know what to produce and how much? Who, for instance, would make such trifling things as contact lens cases and cable ties?”

Given that anarcho-syndicalists aim for workers’ self-management of production, the question is silly. What Jeremy actually means is *“How would workers know what to produce and how much in a non-market socialist system?”* That is the actual question. And for one possible answer, please consult section I.4 of **An Anarchist FAQ**.

He states:

“If there is no market demand, how will you know who needs what? Money is a signal to producers about what and how much they need to produce.”

Nope. Money is a signal that certain people have effective demand and so production is skewed in that direction. No money, no market demand. Equally, it should be noted that the market rewards those who inflict externalities onto society, an issue which is important if we want a society worth living in. Which are some of the reasons why most anarchists reject even non-capitalist markets

He continues:

“Without real money, you have the situation in Soviet Russia, where the central planners tried to pull market prices out of their asses, and the whole damn system collapsed because it wasn’t organic, it was directed from above.”

Yes, the Soviet Union was a terrible mess, directed from above like any capitalist firm or multi-national (i.e. any capitalist form is not “organic” and is “directed from above”). That was part of the reasons anarchists opposed it as simply another form of capitalism (state capitalism). Workers were still wage labourers, following the orders of their bosses. In fact, a good analogy for the USSR was that it was a company country (rather than a company town).

And it should be noted, no anarchist or anarcho-syndicalist aims for central planning. As the CNT quotes make clear, we aim for a decentralised, bottom-up system.

Jeremy ends as follows:

“So let’s take yet another word into our free market lexicon: syndicalism! Capitalist syndicalism might be the dominant corporate structure in a stateless society. If the socialist ‘anarchists’ don’t take us to the killing fields like they did in Spain...”

Two issues.

Firstly, it is clear that the “*free market lexicon*” is simply a collection of words which the “anarcho”-capitalist has redefined to suit his or her needs. As Jeremy has proven so many times in his essay, this is hardly a convincing technique. After all, he has effectively proven that anarchism cannot be defined as it is in his lexicon and must be defined as anarchists have traditionally used it. Equally with syndicalism. While there is a much better existing word (namely, co-operative) for what he is confusingly describing, he decides to take another word, with a specific meaning, and invent a new definition for it! I must thank him for providing us anarchists with a case study in how “anarcho”-capitalists adopt names. As they did with anarchism, they wish to ignore the actual meaning of syndicalism and its long history and instead invent a new definition for it.

Secondly, his reference to “*the killing fields ... in Spain*” shows exactly his concern for the truth. This particular term was invented by “anarcho”-capitalist James Donald to describe the largely spontaneous wave of assassinations which occurred after the CNT helped put down the military coup of July 18th, 1936. As has been proven many times by anarchists, no such “killing fields” existed. Assassinations of expected fascists and right-wingers did happen, old scores were settled (against the employer organised death-squads of the early 1920s, for example) and so on, but no “killing fields” as per Pol Pot (nor are they mentioned by historians, but what do they know?).

That Jeremy invokes such nonsense as his parting shot indicates the lack of quality of his critique (as if more evidence was required!).

What is significant is his implication that the assassinations that occurred involved murdering “anarcho”-capitalists (as he puts it, “*If the socialist ‘anarchists’ don’t take us to the killing fields like they did in Spain...*”). Given that “anarcho”-capitalism was invented in the 1950s, this is impossible. Unless, of course, Jeremy is implying that those killed were similar in outlook to “anarcho”-capitalists. In that case, he is placing himself in the company of fascists, nationalists, capitalists who organised assassination squads to murder union activists, and those who supported the military/fascist coup of General Franco against the growing power and organisation of the workers and peasants in their unions and the mild reforms of the Popular Front. That Jeremy retroactively identifies “anarcho”-capitalists such people (who systematically repressed the workers he claims to be the real champion of) says a lot about “anarcho”-capitalism.

Ultimately, we should thank Jeremy for helping us to prove beyond doubt that both anarchism and syndicalism have nothing to do with capitalism and that while “anarcho”-capitalism tries to redefine the language, it will never succeed and will simply expose its non-anarchist nature.

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A reply to “Capitalist Praise For Anarcho-Syndicalism”

October 13, 2008

Retrieved on 28th January 2021 from anarchism.pageabode.com

A critique of an “anarcho”-capitalist attempt to steal the term syndicalism (like anarchism and libertarian by redefining it away from what it historically means). Ironically, the attempt shows why “anarcho”-capitalism is just not anarchist.

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