

# **WHOSE CLASS STRUGGLE?**

October 1, 2005 by Floyce White

The struggle over semantics is one facet of the overall struggle against capitalism. The conflict over wording does not “go away” no matter what well-intentioned temporary truce you make before a meeting. Pro-capitalists treat your acquiescence as gullibility, and redouble their efforts to impose their terminology. To “play politics” with what you believe to be true is to tell a lie.

In response to the previous article in this series, *Against Anarchism—For Communism*, many anarchists say that those who use the word “anarchism” as I describe are abusing the term. They insist that its “true meaning” is something else. Most define the term according to its etymology—“no ruler”—and assert that “anarchism means no state.” Hah! The concept of “true meaning,” as with all versions of “absolute truth,” originates from class society and serves to support class society. There is no single definition of any political term that is true to both poor and rich, or among all factions of the rich. Interpretations are prejudiced by property interests or the lack thereof. Without a doubt, all upper-class reasoning defends exploitation. Regardless of how they say it, anarchism means a state.

Some anarchists respond by quoting authority figures such as Proudhon, and cite his 1840 essay *What Is Property?* This bourgeois social reformer approved of claims of ownership of things of personal use, while he condemned claims of ownership of things used by others. His semantics exaggerated subtle differences between the meanings of the words “possession” and “property.” Nonsense! Personal possession is just as odious as any other form of property. A “claim” is something you make to other people; property is a method of interacting with others. In the hypothetical absence of any conflict, to say that “I own my shirt,” “you own your shirt,” and “we own our shirts” is not interaction, therefore it is the *trivial* case—as in mathematics when all variables are set to zero. The claim to own some things used by only you and your kin would be entirely unnecessary—and the implied threat of violence to enforce that claim would be anti-social—if not for the need to put up a passive defense against the system of accumulation of wealth and its encroaching dispossession that does not distinguish between things used by one or by many. Personal property is a method of struggle on terms set by the oppressors. Bourgeois radicals such as Proudhon are like college students who become professors without any experience in their fields. They are unaware of this way of putting the question because the point of view of the lower class is not in the books they read. Proudhon saw only an abstract “people” who throughout history all tried to get personal property, so he deduced the false conclusion that personal property must be a cornerstone of every society. In the language of the capitalist, anti-feudal revolution, ownership was a “right” or a “natural law” of which violation was “theft.” The production and distribution of goods and services were not envisioned as sharing, but as “exchange of personal possessions.” In this way, Proudhon created a legalistic loophole for “personal” business properties as well as their association as limited partnerships, co-ops, syndicates, and “employee ownership.”

Proudhon opposed big business and the vast state-owned properties because these are not forms of personal property. Proudhon also opposed the state because police protect claims of non-personal property. Hah! Do a little semantical struggle here. Replace the idea of “exchange of personal possessions” with the phrase “small business,” and it is clear that Proudhon’s interpretation of

"anarchism" is a political movement in the interests of petty capitalists. Since almost all capitalists are small capitalists, his words were not rebellion but apologetics. In the years to follow, the many contradicting definitions of "anarchism" by upper-class authorities mirrored the many competing property interests.

As long as there are capitalists, they will recruit working-class activists to do political labor. Many lower-class anarchists, socialists, and radical liberals struggle to raise broad anti-property demands instead of the intrigues of petty-capitalist interests. This is one form of the struggle for communism. The existence of communist struggle within the anarchist movement does not prove that "anarchism is communism" any more than the existence of lower-class struggle within the radical-liberal movement proves that "radical liberalism is communism." In conflict with the idea that anarchism is a form of capitalism, a few comrades counterpose the expression "anarcho-communism." This phrasing does not work—precisely because it defines "anarchism" as meaning "no state." Along with its corollary, "state capitalism," these terms induce the pair of false opposites "stateless capitalism" and "state communism." False opposite proves false posit. Anyone can compound words as a rhetorical device, but it does not imply any reasoning.

A few comrades make the argument that the self-aware struggle of lower-class activists within the anarchist movement is not different from or inferior to struggle that calls itself "communist." They correctly point out that bourgeois definitions of "communism" are not the meanings used by lower-class activists who call themselves "communists." They insist that quibbling about labels is sectarian divisiveness, so they continue to call themselves "anarchists." No. Speaking up is honest; the refusal to discuss differences is divisive. Activists frequently work out disagreements about events, and often resolve conflicts over semantics. Words have meanings that are defined by the social and political movements of property classes—not by dictionary authors. The worldwide dispossessed class has no factions with property interests; therefore, the poor can build overwhelming unity in speech and action. It is sheer nihilism to suggest that, for the lower class, "communism" and "anarchism" and "socialism" and "liberalism" and any number of other words all have similar, overlapping meanings, or to suggest that one single word can not and must not have the unique definition of "the struggle of the poor against the rich." "Communism" has this meaning—that is why upper-class repression of this struggle is called "anti-communism."

Some comrades say that "socialism" is the name of the rebellion of the poor, but never show me the leaflets they mass distribute denouncing comrades of capitalist family origins as "the living counterrevolution within revolutionary organizations." Some comrades say that "anarchism is a method" of opposing the violence that upholds property claims, but never show me where they write that employers, landlords, merchants, and investors are incapable of this method and "must step aside and become sympathizers without voice and vote." What I call "communism" cannot be achieved by fighting only the external oppressor while surrendering the "struggle within the struggle." Communism cannot be achieved through a populist appeal to "class struggle" in general that does not differentiate itself from the intra-class struggle within the upper class. Communism can be achieved only when lower-class people unite in action, in organization, and in diction. The principle of *preference is exclusion* is forever used to divide and conquer us; now we must use it to prefer association with fellow poor people, to organize independent of exploiters big and small, and to reject their excuses for being exploiters.

This article is the eleventh in a series, available at <http://www.geocities.com/antiproperty>