

COMMUNISM MEANS COMMUNES

October 1, 2002 by Floyce White

Father, son, and the property inheritance they claim: the holy trinity of class society. Nothing is more sacred to the propertied class save sanctity itself. Nothing is more accursed to the dispossessed class than their birthright. Degraders and degraded, both are grateful to receive a coin. Both become something less than human by the knowledge that a coin in their hands means one fewer for someone else. After years of such disease comes the welcome release, and begins anew the cycle of inheritance or lack thereof.

Property is no mystery. Every small child is taught the system of "yours" and "mine." Transgression is punished with threats and physical harm. Without the stupid brutality of police, the dispossessed would not allow others to treat them as chattel. Without the organized violence of the state, there could be no familial inheritance classes.

Terrorism by special small bodies is the method of struggle of the propertied. Direct mass action is the method of struggle of the dispossessed. Police, courts, and jails are not classless forms that could be filled with any class content. Their opposite—the self-mobilization of the working class—is also not a classless form that could "follow" hierarchical "leadership." The strategy of arming a special body to rule over others cannot be reconciled with the strategy of the masses arming themselves to end the system of rulers and ruled. Before, during, or after the revolution, to subordinate working-class struggle to the functions of governmental bodies is unrepentant liberalism.

Over the past year I've had many discussions about this series of articles. Many comrades tell me that they agree almost completely with the points I've raised. Then they "dialectically" try to square them with the "Marxist" half-truth that "the state is a form of rule of one class over another." They too disagree with forming a typical capitalist nation-state after a workers' revolution, but want to create a state of a "totally different" type. The caricatures of conformity labeled as "workers' states" cause us to look elsewhere for working-class forms of post-revolutionary organization.

Throughout class society, the dispossessed have taken direct mass action to separate from the oppression of property. The more-successful attempts, such as the Spartacist uprising in Ancient Rome, involved an entire city or region. In the modern era, two world-shaking rebellions stand as our examples: the 1871 Paris Commune and the 1927 Shanghai Commune. There were other attempts to make communes, most notably in Shanghai in 1967. However, socialists usually were successful at discouraging and diverting the sort of self-organized direct action that culminates in local rebellions.

The commune is a form of struggle against exploitation. So is the similar soviet, or council form. By any name it is the comprehensive local organization of working-class struggle. In many ways it is an *anti-organization*, akin to the anti-formula movie. Anti-organization rejects the divisiveness that organized power traditionally uses to maintain its rule. Anti-organization achieves the most-rapid completion of its tasks using the most-irreversible methods. Anti-organization is highly organized, unlike riots that are not at all organized, or anarchist "networks" or socialist "vanguards" that have

only superficial participation by the masses. Anti-organization is the distinctive feature that makes working-class struggle an anti-class struggle.

When the revolution begins and the commune is formed, the lower class takes the initiative and moves from defense to offense. The slogan “defend the revolution” is exposed as a provocation to snarl revolutionary advance. Previously separate from the many reform groups of varied class composition, the party of the working class becomes the same as the commune, while the commune becomes the same as the activity of the working class. The victory of a commune—the abolition of property and therefore the end of familial inheritance classes—is the conversion of a commune into a community: the natural social unit of the species.

Pro-state socialists argue that communes “can’t win” against the armies of nation-states. According to them, workers must wait to rebel until they can “take power” over a whole country. A political-not-social revolution would then re-form the nation with a new government. A regular army and police would be raised to protect property rights in the territory. Workers would go back to work as usual and wait until socialists divide and conquer the whole world, country by country. Only then could socialist practices be fully instilled in the masses so that our descendants could create communism. The USSR and the People’s Republic of China are cited as practical examples of this theory—examples that were flawed and failed yet were correct in their basic approach. Hah! Ask it the other way. Are the failures of the USSR and China the practical results of flawed theory? No. “Socialist countries” or “workers’ states” are not failures at being nation-states. The theory of “dictatorship of the proletariat,” when put into practice, co-opted the soviet form and immediately drained it of the substance of direct mass action.

Were the Paris and Shanghai Communes practical examples of correct theory? Hardly. The Communists lacked ideological preparedness—evidenced by their naive use of bourgeois jargon. They were motivated by nationalism and stuck to parliamentarism. These communes were defeated by external pro-capitalist forces while working-class activists were losing the internal anti-capitalist struggle. If anything, theory about communes lagged miserably behind practice.

Ten years after the Russian capitalist revolution gave the bum rush to the soviet movement—and then dressed down as “Soviet Socialist Republics”—the re-emergence of the commune form was startling. The significance of the Shanghai Commune was not lost on Chinese communists, who repeatedly tried to make commune building the focus of laboring-class activism. Communist Party “leaders” co-opted this movement by dividing it into weak micro-communes that were, in reality, Russian-style co-ops (units of property ownership and accumulation) and mere wards in ordinary county government. Chinese capitalists later privatized the faux communes.

If it were possible to use the customs, traditions, and institutions of class rule to end class rule, we would have won long ago. The failures of previous communist uprisings were not—as socialists suggest—that the upper class did not create the proper conditions. Their failures were in trying to use forms of rule to end rule. Form and substance are the external and internal characteristics of the same process. Something “totally different” from capitalist property relations is no property at all. Something “totally different” from the nation-state is no state at all.