

An Open Letter to Anarcho-Socialists

Socialism is an economic system based on the collectivist ownership (e.g., co-ops, worker-management, the people as a whole, etc.) of the means of production (i.e., capital). Anarcho-socialism (a.k.a., social anarchism) is likewise, except ownership is voluntary, without a state. Different schools of thought make up this ansoc philosophy; such as anarcho-collectivism, anarcho-communism, anarcho-syndicalism, mutualism, libertarian socialism, left-libertarianism, and social ecology.

Rivaling with capitalism, a socialist economy is based on the principle of production for use (as opposed to for profit, seen in capitalism), the labor theory of value (as opposed to the subjective theory, also in capitalism), and an attempt at egalitarianism (as opposed to individualism, often found in capitalism). This rivalry was born in the early 1800's in the wake of the French Revolution and the first industrial revolution, when states around the world were at odds with the people and state capitalism was unchecked.

In response to a magistrate's question about what is socialism, inquiring about the Revolution of 1848, the father of philosophical anarchism Pierre-Joseph Proudhon said that it is "[e]very aspiration towards the amelioration of society." The founder of anarcho-socialism Mikhail Bakunin, while in a Russian prison in 1851, wrote that his anarchist variety was "the confirmation of political equality by economic equality. This is not the removal of natural individual differences, but equality in the social rights of every individual from birth."

The overarching revolutions throughout Europe during the mid-nineteenth century were waged by the people against their governments. Revolting over the dissatisfaction with political leadership, lack of democratic means of change, and feudal treatment of the working classes. The Enlightenment movement had a lasting impact on Europe, thus the springs exacerbated during this time. Technological advances, ironically, spread political awareness, via the press, and it awakened reformers of all stripes, including socialists.

However, as classical liberal economist Frederic Bastiat observed in his essay, "the Law" (1850), socialists started using political discourse to impose reform, rather than voluntarily. Many socialists, especially of the stateless variety, opposed Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels; for they sought to impose income taxes, confiscation of property of who they labeled undesirable, a central bank, and a strong central government. (Ansocs who are Marxists have some reconciling to do) As the ansoc intellectuals have said, state socialist countries, including communist ones, never went stateless like promised.

In the book *Natural Law* (1882), practicing anarchist Lysander Spooner wrote, "[n]o man can rightfully be required to join, or support, an association whose protection he does not

desire.” This was two decades after his anti-statist, capitalist company was forcefully shut down by the United States government. A few years later, Spooner’s colleague, Benjamin Tucker (who translated into English many of Proudhon’s and Bakunin’s works), wrote in his 1888 book *State Socialism and Anarchism*, “just as it has been said that there is no half-way house between Rome and Reason, so it may be said that there is no half-way house between State Socialism and Anarchism.” He also called out Marx, specifically, in it.

Peter Kropotkin opposed authoritarian means to socialism, arguing in the *Conquest of Bread* (1892), “[t]o avoid a possible evil you have recourse to means which in themselves are a greater evil, and become the source of those same abuses that you wish to remedy.” In the same vein, Rudolf Rocker said of the state socialists in *Anarch-Syndicalism* (1938), “in place of the creative Socialism of the old International, there developed a sort of substitute product which has nothing in common with real Socialism but the name.” These two, explicitly, like the fore-mentioned implicitly, draw a line between anarcho-socialism and state socialism, highlighting that in-fighting.

The proletariat, seemingly-led by Marx et. al, were resorting to violence during their revolutions. The bourgeoisie, which economically-speaking included Marx and Engels given their backgrounds, feared the violence, and so co-opted the socialists seeking political power. Rural areas blamed famines on the bourgeoisie, and joined the urban forces in their endeavor. As a response, Proudhon declared, “we have been beaten and humiliated...scattered, imprisoned, disarmed and gagged. The fate of European democracy has slipped from our hands.”

Many economists, historians, and political theorists – including socialists and ansocs – have acknowledged this defeat and offered analysis. One such analysis to explain it that socialists joined the enemy politically and conflated economics in search for a scapegoat. By enlisting in the parliamentary procedure they invite the same perversion of law they sought to decimate. Feudalism and cronyism, after all, were able to be imposed on people through the “legal plunder” of the law.

For centuries before the revolutions, a “capitalist” was anyone who owned capital (e.g., livestock, tools, funds, etc). The word as it’s used today was first used in 1788 by French career student Etienne Clavier; then used in English by populist writer Arthur Young in 1792 after traveling to France. Free-market economist David Ricardo, and even Proudhon himself, defined “capitalist” as simply “owner of capital.”

In 1850 (seventeen years before Marx’s *Das Kapital*), socialist political leader Louis Blanc defined capitalism as “the appropriation of capital by some to the exclusion of others.” Proudhon in 1861 defined it as an “[e]conomic and social regime in which capital, the source of income, does not generally belong to those who make it work through their labour.” Up until Marx, socialists attacked state capitalism, while Marx focused less on the

economics of the subject, and more on the politics.

Capitalism is an economic system based on the individualist ownership of the means of production (i.e., capital). Anarcho-capitalism is likewise, except ownership is voluntary, without a state. Different schools of thought make up this ancap philosophy; such as anarcho-individualism, anarcho-distributism, anarcho-egoism, and right-libertarianism.

Next, the meat of economics: addressing socialist arguments against capitalism. For this, the socialist redefinition of capitalism will be stylized as “state capitalism,” while “capitalism” will be defined as in the previous paragraph. (Side note: historical evidence has been provided that some socialists redefined the word for their agenda)

Hoarding of natural resources. Socialists argue that capitalism allows landowners to buy land, and hold it for appreciation. This accumulation of capital, they argue, is at the expense of the needy. Capitalists retort that without a central bank or government to subsidize or bail out a landowner, he will have to garner wealth using the resources and sell his own labors (some socialists only take issue with hoarding, so this would suffice them).

Environmental pollution. Socialists argue that capitalism allows for unfettered pollution of the environment, via externalities. This is a result, as Dr. Walter Block argues, because states started intervening in property rights. Before the zenith of the first industrial revolution, pollution was miniscule, because landowners were able to take polluters to court. Statism, not capitalism, protected the polluters, via political discourse. This progression is documented in U.S. history; while other states were statist long before they became state capitalist.

Class warfare or class system. Socialists argue that capitalism favors producers (a.k.a. by Marxists as the bourgeoisie) at the expense of the workers (a.k.a., the proletariat). Wages, hours, and the division of net profit, are not only a reaction to the human capital of workers, but to the political environment. When states pass regulations on the market (e.g., minimum wage mandates, occupational licensing, taxes on production and profit, etc), they calculate who can produce at least the state’s minimum wage, who’s got the right credentials, and other costs they ought to cut to continue doing business.

Not to mention price controls and other taxes that states impose, which forces businesses to raise the prices on consumer goods. This is how business is run, even under socialist systems (albeit without a money system). Safety regulations have harmed small businesses that have yet to afford appropriate safety measures. The act of workers compensation, for example, was a reaction to market demand. Businesses have incentive to want to keep customers and workers satisfied; especially if they won’t have a central bank or government to sponsor their cronyism.

German sociologist and Austrian-school economist, and colleague to Marx, Max Weber agreed in the existence of the class system Marx had described, but disagreed on its formation. Weber said that classes formed from their location and pedigree – a recognized classification among socialists, given their ardent opposition to inheritance and nepotism. Weber's opinion was that political power exacerbated pedigree, but location is a matter that won't just go away.

Hierarchical corporate governance. Socialists argue that capitalism in and of itself is hierarchical; a form of governance they oppose because of "exploitation" (according to Marx, this was "the forced appropriation of the unpaid labor of workers," which he claimed included all workers). The industrial revolution saw a boom in technological advancement, a progress from the agricultural era. Ironically, the intellectual debt to both socialists and modern capitalists are the prolific members of the Enlightenment movement who promoted reason over superstition, progress over tradition, liberty over tyranny (or at least big-government tyranny). This relatively-rapid boom, coupled with growing government and political unrest throughout North America and Europe, incentivized workers to turn to politicians for aid – as ansocs and ancaps agree, bad idea (even when state socialists were in power).

Had there not been a government, peaceful revolutions would have gave the workers a chance to fight for their rights, and either have better conditions or form socialist societies – statism prevented either or. Not to mention two other facts: that not all people know how or even want to be entrepreneurial, and thus choose to work as an employee to someone else for a negotiated wage; and capitalists in the twentieth century have been coming up with alternatives to corporate hierarchy, such as heterarchy, wirearchy, market-based management, etc. Statism prevents them, and socialists turn their nose at them. "Damned if I do, damned if I don't," becomes an understandable mantra.

Wage labor, sweatshops, and other forms of employment under duress. Socialists argue that capitalism promotes a workforce under duress. Early socialists attacked the feudal aspect of wage labor, that is was under duress thanks to statism. For them it was about free choice. It wasn't until Marx, that wage labor is attacked even if workers weren't under duress. The economic thing Marxist and modern socialists don't realize is, workers who work for a wage, their employer has provided the equipment and opportunity that didn't exist for the worker before – plus the training. If not for statism, workers would have more of a bargaining power.

Sweatshops, on the other hand, were initially short-term employment as workers eventually climbed the ladder. Socialists who successfully got into the echelons of the government throughout Europe passed regulations that swelled sweatshops. The black market, thanks to those regulations, grew. The third-world example often touted ignores the fact, the corporations there get subsidized and protected by the state. Without the

state, a capitalist system would have little to no sweatshops – or employment under duress since people would be able to start their own businesses more freely.

Individualist land ownership. Socialists believe in a collectivist ownership of this issue. The rest of the issues I believe through calm, peaceful discussion we could talk through. We are, after all, anarchists, you know peace and law without the state. Land ownership is a topic to be continued...

Learning basic economics and even the beliefs of those you look up to are very important. If you don't know much about economics, or about the intents of ansoc intellectuals, you won't be able to promote anarcho-socialism adequately, and you'll be angry at anarcho-capitalism for the faults of statism (not just state capitalism, but also state socialism). Finally, in the words of Christian anarchist, Leo Tolstoy, "[e]veryone thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing himself."

– Kenny Kelly