

Voluntary Communism

I'm reading a book by Walter Block, ie. libertarian extraordinaire, titled "The Case for Discrimination". In chapter 17, he gives a wonderful defense for all things voluntary, including voluntary communism, worthy of a place here at Everything-Voluntary:

[There] is nothing at all wrong with the form of communism practiced by the Hutterites! As a long-time advocate of the free market system, I hasten to explain this, lest misunderstanding arise.

As I view the long, broad scope of political economy, the main danger to innocent people comes from those individuals who seek to achieve their ends by force, or by the threat of force, violence, and aggression. Certainly, coercive communism, as practiced in Russia, mainland China, Cuba, Eastern Europe, and elsewhere behind the Iron Curtain are all examples of this. In these societies, people are forced to give their be-all and end-all to the state apparatus. Virtually all property has been seized by the government, and the people are little better than slaves to their masters.

But force, coercion, and institutionalized violence are by no means limited to communist countries. Western democracies (such as Canada) and right-wing dictatorships also utilize such measures, albeit to a lesser degree. Legislation underlying tariffs, Crown corporations, unions, rent control, marketing boards, business subsidies and bailouts, minimum wages, socialized medicine, and agricultural land reserves are just as much violation of person and property—even if to a lesser degree—as the government exploitation which occurs behind the Iron Curtain.

In stark contrast to coercive systems—whether of the left or the right—are voluntary ones. Here, all, or at least virtually all, interactions between adults take place on a strictly voluntary basis, with no violation of person or property. One such is the institution of

free enterprise, where the scope of government is severely restrained and all capitalist “acts between consenting adults” are allowed. Although we human beings have never on this earth fully reached so exalted a state, present reasonably close examples might be Hong Kong and several other free trade zones; in the past, the United States and Great Britain during much of the 19th century.

Another such system is that of voluntary communism. Examples include the monastery, the kibbutz in Israel, the average Canadian family, various “utopias” and “communes” in the past, and, I am convinced, the present day Hutterites. In each of these cases is practiced the communist dictum “from each according to his ability, to each according to his need.” There is nothing, repeat nothing, reprehensible about this dictum—provided it is done on a strictly voluntary basis. Take the typical family as a case in point. The working father may earn all the income, but certainly does not use it all up himself. The 2-year-old child, in contrast, earns no income at all; nevertheless it eats in accordance with its needs.

Voluntary communism, together with laissez-faire capitalism, has nothing to be ashamed of on moral and economic grounds. They can each hold up their heads, high. Far from enemies, they are merely opposite sides of the same voluntaristic coin. Together, they must battle state coercion, whether called State Capitalism or State Socialism. The point is, “left” vs. “right” is a red herring. The reddest and perhaps most misleading red herring in all political-economic theory.

The true debate is not between left and right. It is, rather, between voluntarism (whether of left or right) and coercivism (whether of left or right). The sooner this lesson is learned, the sooner can we make sense of our otherwise paradoxical political debates.

I am reminded of the charges of communism or socialism aimed at what Mormons call the Law of Consecration. To be honest, I've always considered living the Law of Consecration a form of communism, albeit voluntary communism. The charges aren't unfounded in that respect.

Skyler.