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# **Between Anarchism and Marxism : Confusion and "Bad Faith" in Revolutionary Thinking and Practice (2)**

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Historical developments seem to indicate that hierarchical political structures are "revolutionary in intent or not" lead to manipulations and forms of social and political domination. Institutionalized, formalized control over others develops that is counterproductive in revolutionary struggles in that it is invidious to the emergence of healthy social relations.

### ***Ideals and authoritarian socialism : Dialectics of "Bad Faith"***

There is a mechanism here that leads to (or contributes to) what Jean-Paul Sartre called *la mauvaise foi* that "bad faith" that justifies the use of others for selfish reasons that is masked as altruism. In other words, one's own self-interested motives are transformed, in one's own mind, into the most selfless ideals. They are then presented to others in this guise.

"Bad faith" is not peculiar to the capitalist system or to reactionary politics. It is a psychic mechanism of people who, for a variety of reasons, have not learned to pursue their personal projects or to present themselves as individuals openly, without resorting to misrepresentation. Instead of confronting positively inter-personal differences or interests, this personal weakness is compensated for by the manipulation of others.

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It is important to understand that the exercise of bad faith cannot be a totally unconscious process. The major distinction here is that conscious deception is more than hypocrisy ; it is lying. In contrast, bad faith is situated somewhere between consciously deceitful, calculated deception (lying) on the one hand, and the hypocritical blindness characteristic of narcissistic egoism on the other. As Sartre says, bad faith is a continual vacillation between self-delusion and the terror of understanding and, consequently, self-reproach. [1] It is this uneasiness, this malaise, which reinforces the will to dominate others by any and all means. It is a failure to confront the contradiction between self-interest and professed motivations that produces (or contributes to) the authoritarian pathologies that can be associated with Leninism. [2]

From a phenomenological or psychoanalytical perspective, therefore, we are in the presence of political mechanism produced by the psychic consequences of hierarchical social relations, those inherent in both feudal and capitalist systems. But this type of character formation has the effect of reinforcing non-egalitarian social relations. Character weaknesses and emotional immaturity, involving low self-esteem, passivity and submissiveness to authority, even when compensated for by rebellious poses and attitudes, can lie behind authoritarian casts of mind.

The political consequences of character and personality formation can be a serious problem in political activity and decision-making. Subjectively, and within a "progressive" milieu, the desire to democratize social relations is often used as a means to dominate other people in order to liberate them. Objectively (or "sociologically") speaking, however, the effect is to replicate the existing social relations necessary to the perpetuation of domination and exploitation.

Again, it must be insisted that, on the revolutionary political Left, this will to dominate is rarely cynical. Rather, it is explained *to the self* as well as to others as necessary in the pursuit of a social ideal. But it is a psychic house of cards that is fragile. Bad faith is in continual danger of self-revelation, which is why any attempt to call attention to its weaknesses brings forth the most violent and merciless retaliation. So dominant was this paranoid, desperate and arrogant mindset on the revolutionary political Left that many involved with libertarian socialism have been, also, seriously afflicted by it.

### ***Towards a libertarian socialist revolutionary praxis***

After one century of enormous influence over the expression of revolutionary thought and practice in the western industrial capitalist countries, the dominance of authoritarian socialism no longer exists. And this is why the potential for libertarian socialism, is now greater than ever.

Over the past several decades, the once strong Communist parties have largely collapsed, and support for other Marxist-Leninist organizations has also dramatically dwindled. In contrast, it is true that, for more than thirty years, the most dynamic critique of capitalism has been, in some way, "Green". We have come to understand that environmental destruction is an inescapable sign of the humanly dysfunctional essence of the capitalist system. But the limitations of the environmental, anti-corporate movement are also manifest, and it seems equally clear that environmentalism, as a reform program, is no solution to the problem posed by the capitalist system of production.

What is needed is a generalized recognition of how a non-authoritarian, anti-capitalist perspective has developed over the past century and a half, and how it can offer a solution to the class-based, shortsighted logic inherent in capitalist production. This is the analysis and world view that drawing from the works of all revolutionary writers and actors who have elucidated and combated this system that must now be presented as the revolutionary position most capable of inspiring real democratic "libertarian and egalitarian" change. The history and contemporary relevance of this understanding, this existing tradition, must rise out of obscurity, out of the recesses of revolutionary theory and practice, and be shown to be the most ethnically coherent, analytically refined, and socially healthy orientation produced by resistance to the rise and decline of the capitalist system.

This is what we must refer to, but to whom should we refer ? We all have contributions to make to this historic task. And we all have ideas about who has been important in the elaboration of libertarian socialism. However, there are a number of such people who have been generally neglected because they have not been limited by dogma, confusion or bad faith. People like, for example, William Morris.

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Morris remains an outstandingly relevant thinker for our times because his appropriation and active propagation of both Marxian analysis and libertarian principles, on the one hand, and his integration of aesthetic concerns and environmentalist sensitivities responds more and more to contemporary conditions. Morris' focus on how industrialism capitalism devastated the human habitat for the vast majority of people, and how that devastation contributes to the destruction of human spirituality is, perhaps, a contribution that is far-too-neglected. And it is one that needs greater elaboration. His novel *News from Nowhere* (1890), for example, breaks down the invidious distinction between "utopian" and "scientific" socialist perspectives.

Another neglected revolutionary thinker is Georges Sorel. His contribution to anti-capitalist thinking has either been misunderstood or consciously maligned, and that his place in the evolution of libertarian socialism is essential. Sorel was one of the earliest to insist, like Marx himself, that there was little in common between Marxian ideas and Marxist dogma, at least concerning revolutionary philosophy. This perception caused him to be one of the first to explore the complex philosophical and epistemological underpinnings of Marx's thought. But it was an effort eclipsed both by slanderous interpretation on the part of capitalist ideologists and by the Bolshevik revolution and its lamentable effect on revolutionary thought in general.

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Most importantly, for Georges Sorel, as for William Morris, the object of revolutionary struggle is, or should be, the engendering of values "morality in this sense" that contribute to the acceptance of social solidarity and individual creativity. Egalitarian revolution means overcoming the deference towards authority generated by hierarchy and social-class domination. It means liberation in the Wilhelm-Reichian sense, of a society of psychically free individuals, tolerant of others, recognizing their own limitations, and yet confident in their own creative potential.

This stress on the Revolution as a moral transformation "one that forges values through political struggle" can

easily be derided as "bourgeois humanism"â€"which is perhaps why George Orwell referred to "bourgeois morality" as "common decency", or why C.L.R. James placed high value on a "sense of fair play". Orwell understood that the epithet "bourgeois" is simply part of that totalitarian cant that must be exposed as such.

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Another major example of transcendence of the Great Misunderstanding in the evolution of revolutionary theory and practice is the experience of the Industrial Workers of the World (I.W.W.). There must be a reason (and there is) why the I.W.W. continues to enjoy the admiration, even the adulation, of revolutionaries coming from both the libertarian and authoritarian ranks. But what is particularly striking is how so many disillusioned people from Leninist backgrounds became (and have become) nostalgic about the actions, the organisation and especially the spirit of the famous Wobblies. [3]

There are important examples of the passage from authoritarian to libertarian socialism, such as Victor Serge, Daniel Gu rin, Daniel Anselme, or Clancy Segal. And there are many people who always seemed to have avoided the Great Misunderstanding, such as Franklin and Penelope Rosemont, Georges Fontenis and Ren  Lefevre.

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It seems clear that both Leninist and reformist socialism have reached a dead end, that they are in a state of complete decomposition. One indication is that there are now Marxist mandarins, still enjoying the advantages of political and publishing networks, who are attempting to shift towards the libertarian left, but without joining what they call the "ultra-left".

The problem is that an alternative to doctrinaire anarchism and stultified Marxism exists ; it is revolutionary, libertarian socialism, or "anarcho-communism-", and it is the "ultra-Left". To make the shiftâ€"this political transition to a non-doctrinaire revolutionary perspective and practice, means abandoning the habit of intellectual domination and the smearing of opponents. It means becoming aware of how the elitist approach to knowledge and its usesâ€"that cultivated especially in universities and political partiesâ€"is destructive of real political consciousness and of individual creativity. It means breaking with the idolatry proper to movements based on the faith inspired by the cult of the leaderâ€"whether Marx or Lenin or Trotsky or Mao or Che Guevara or Bakunin or Durruti.

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[1] According to Sartre, "there is in fact an 'evanescence' of bad faith" that "vacillates continually between good faith and cynicism" belonging "to the kind of psychic structures which we might call *metastable*, it presents nonetheless an autonomous and durable form. It can even be the normal aspect of life for a very great number of people. A person can live in bad faith, which does not mean that he does not have abrupt awakenings to cynicism or to good faith, but which implies a constant and particular style of life." Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, translated by Hazel Barnes, New York, Washington Square Press, 1969 [1943], p. 90.

[2] Those evoked in homilies such as "The end justifies the means" or "You can't make an omelette without breaking eggs".

[3] See, for example, Len De Caux, *The Living Spirit of the Wobblies*, New York, International Publishers, 1978, Philip S. Foner, *The Industrial Workers of the World 1905-1917*, New York, International Publishers, 1965, and Clancy Sigal, *Going Away : A Report, A Memoir*, New York, Carol and Graf Publishers, 1961.