

People and Property in the Building of Communism¹

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MICHAEL A. LEBOWITZ²

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I. COMMUNIST PROPERTY

1. Communist property belongs to everyone and to no one. Given common ownership of the means of production, 'objective wealth is there to satisfy the worker's own need for development' (Marx: 1977: 772). Communist property encourages 'free individuality, based on the universal development of individuals and on the subordination of their communal, social productivity as their social wealth' (Marx: 1973, 158). Insofar as no one can be excluded from enjoying its fruits, ownership of the means of production in common underlines the indivisibility of that 'association in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all'.

2. Yet, if communist property belongs to everyone and to no one, how does this society avoid the so-called 'tragedy of the commons'? How can it avoid a situation in which rational individuals, thinking about their own self-interest, use common property to excess and thus produce collectively irrational outcomes? Given, too, that individuals

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cannot be excluded from obtaining the benefits of that common property, what stops them from ‘free—riding’, i.e., from deciding not to contribute to the creation of those benefits?³

3. The answer is simple— and ultimately unsatisfying. The ‘tragedy of the commons’ and other such outcomes are excluded *by definition* when we are describing communism as it has ‘developed on its own foundations,’ i.e., the higher phase of communist society. This communism is an organic system, a ‘structure of society, in which all relations coexist simultaneously and support one another’ (Marx: 1976, 167). Thus, as is ‘the case with every organic system,’ in the completed communist system every economic relation presupposes every other in its communist economic form, ‘and everything posited is thus also a presupposition’ (Marx: 1973, 278, 460). In particular, communism as an organic system produces, as its own premise, the people who ‘by education, tradition and habit look upon the requirements of that mode of production as self—evident natural laws’ (Marx: 1977, 899).

4. These are people for whom labour is no longer toil and trouble, a sacrifice; rather, their productive activity (‘life’s prime want’) is the basis of their own self—development as social human beings, the ‘development of the rich individuality which is as all—sided in its production as in its consumption’ (Marx, 1973: 325). Indeed, the most important products of this society of freely associated producers are rich human beings able to develop their full potential — i.e., the ‘absolute working—out of his creative potentialities,’ the ‘complete working—out of the human content,’ the ‘development of all human powers as such the end in itself’ (Marx, 1973: 488, 541, 708; Lebowitz, 2003b). In communism as it has developed upon its own foundations, the productive forces have ‘increased with the all—round development of the individual, and all the springs of co—operative wealth flow more abundantly’ (Marx, 1962: 24).

5. Thus, rather than the self—orientation that may produce a ‘tragedy of the commons,’ here ‘communal production, communality, is presupposed as the basis of production,’ and the ‘labour of the individual is posited from the outset as social labour’ (Marx: 1973, 172). The associated producers expend ‘their many different forms of labour—power in full

² Simon Fraser University, Canada

³ For a discussion of these problems, see Runge (1992) and Ostrom (1990:1—15).

self—awareness as one single social labour force,’ and the products of their activity are social property, belonging to everyone— not on the basis of any particular claims but, rather, in accordance simply with the needs of each member of society (Marx: 1977, 171).

6. Why is this simple answer unsatisfying? Obviously because it begs the critical question— *how are such people developed, people for whom common property is common sense?*

II. THE ‘DEFECT’ OF EARLY COMMUNISM

7. The most consistent and serious error in theoretical discussions of socialism and socialist planning is to assume the existence of the people produced in fully developed communism. Assume this, and you have assumed away any self—interested behaviour that may be contrary to the interests of society as a whole; thus, there are no problems of monitoring individual or group behaviour (including monitoring the monitors), sanctioning violations of society’s interests, or ensuring accuracy of information (*cf.* Ostrom, 1990: 10). Such perverse, anti—social behaviour as withholding accurate information for planning (exhibited by enterprise managers in Soviet—type planning) is assumed not to exist; accordingly, Alec Nove’s comment is irrelevant:

information flows are bound to be affected, distorted, by the interest of the information—providers....To expect unbiased information from those interested in the results to which the information is put is to live in cloud—cuckoo—land (Nove, 20).

8. In short, there will be no errors in planning or coordinating the activities of the associated producers. Assume the right people and there are no difficulties and, accordingly, no costs of monitoring, sanctioning or administrating cooperative production based upon the common ownership of the means of production.

9. Marx, however, understood quite well that those people do not drop from the sky— i.e., that we need to distinguish clearly between communism as fully developed and communism as it emerges from capitalism. Precisely because the members of the lower phase of communism are ‘in every respect, economically, morally and intellectually, still stamped with the birth marks of the old society’, the presuppositions of communism are not

yet produced in their communist form. In particular, ‘bourgeois right’ has not been fully transcended—the claims of the associated producers upon society’s output are determined not by their membership in society but by ‘the labour they supply’ (Marx: 1962, 23—4). The relation of distribution identified by Marx as a ‘defect’ in this lower phase (generally described as socialism), in short, is that of distribution in accordance with work (or contribution).

10. But why? Relations of distribution are only the ‘reverse side’ of relations of production; they cannot be treated ‘as independent of the mode of production.’ So, precisely what is the relation of production which generates this particular distribution rule? This is a question that has been asked far too seldom (despite much invocation of the phrase, ‘bourgeois right’). *The relation of production which underlies this specific relation of distribution attributed to the lower phase of communist society is one of production by private owners of labour—power.* Despite the common ownership of the ‘material conditions of production,’ despite the partial passage beyond the ‘narrow horizon of bourgeois right,’ labour—power remains private property. Insofar as producers relate to each other as the ‘owners of the personal condition of production, of labour power’ (Marx: 1962, 23.25), each producer demands a *quid pro quo* for the expenditure of her activity, seeks to maximise income for a given quantity of labour (or to minimise labour for a given income).

11. As separate owners of labour—power, self—interest— rather than communal needs and purposes— guides the activity of producers. For maintenance and reproduction of this relation among these owners, the condition is that all receive their equivalent: ‘a given amount of labour in one form is exchanged for an equal amount in another form.’

Distribution in accordance with contribution, in short, is the means for the reproduction of a relation of production based upon labour—power as private property.

12. It is, of course, the reproduction of inequality. In this ‘pooling’ of labour— a partnership arrangement in which each puts a certain quantum of labour into the ‘common pot’ and takes out its equivalent, everyone doesn’t put the same amount into that pot. Those equivalents to which people have a claim necessarily differ because people differ in their ‘individual endowments’. Due to physical or mental differences, one producer ‘supplies more labour in the same time’ than another. That is true in all societies—including in

communism as an organic system. It *matters*, however, in this lower phase of communism where producers are the owners of the personal condition of production. Where producers relate as owners of labour—power, ‘equal right’ necessarily means unequal claims, inequality in distribution, a characteristic flowing from the ‘defect’ of this phase of communism.

13. Inequality in distribution is not, however, the only manifestation of this relation. Their ties as private owners of the personal condition of production affect the other sides of their relations within this society (which include their association as common owners of the means of production, as producers engaged in cooperation and as self—governing citizens). Consider the implications for the common ownership of the means of production. Insofar as private ownership of labour—power generates claims upon output based upon that ownership, it fosters an opposing ownership claim. After all, if producers are common and equal owners of means of production, why should they not share equally in the fruits of that ownership? Insofar as they relate as such owners, the logical relation of distribution is: *to each according to her per capita share*— a case of pure egalitarianism in consumption. Thus, rather than serving as the basis for satisfaction of communal needs (as in the higher phase), common property in the means of production here remains an ownership claim, another bourgeois right.

14. What is the appropriate return for ownership of means of production *vs.* the return for ownership of labour—power? In the contradiction within ownership characteristic of the lower phase of communist society, there is an inherent basis for conflict between two quite opposite principles of distribution— distribution in accordance with contribution (which implies inequality) *vs.* ‘levelling’ (*uravnilovka*) or egalitarianism. Whereas from the perspective of the private ownership of labour—power a tendency toward egalitarianism may be denounced as ‘crude communism’, as ‘eating from the big pot’, and as ‘petit—bourgeois egalitarianism’, it is essential to recognise that this tendency flows from an essential condition for building a communist society— the common ownership of the means of production. On the other hand, given that communism (like all organic systems) must initially be based upon historical presuppositions rather than those it produces itself, attacks on income inequalities arising from differential contributions attack actually

existing producers who look upon such differences as common sense.

15. Not only are the tendencies flowing from these two sides of ownership opposed (and the basis for swings between these two poles) but they also interact and interpenetrate. Thus, efforts to equalise incomes emanating from the side of common ownership stimulate private owners of labour—power to respond by changing the quality, quantity and allocation of their productive activity. As both common owners of means of production and private owners of labour—power, if producers view their income principally as a return for the former and only minimally for the latter, they will part with their individual property only to the extent necessary to secure the return for their collective property (and will, in this respect, ‘free—ride’). Diversion of their activity to private transactions in which they secure a greater individual return (i.e., second jobs and an ‘underground’ or ‘second’ economy) is predictable under these conditions. Similarly, the feeling that they have been deprived of the equivalent of their contribution may produce self—justification for compensating by securing additional resources through indirect and hidden means.

16. Conversely, the existence of significant inequality in the economy is not consistent with maintenance of solidarity, and it may lead those who fare less well to consider that they are not receiving their fair share of the benefits from the common ownership of the means of production. Accordingly, they may rationalise attempts to compensate through unsanctioned ways to increase their incomes, asserting in this way their right to a greater share of the commons. In this respect, elements which can produce patterns of collective irrationality such as the tragedy of the commons are present in the combination of the two forms of ownership characteristic of the lower phase of communist society.

17. The tendency toward the levelling of incomes, which emanates from the side of common ownership of the means of production, in its essence is the propensity to turn labour—power into common property.⁴ There is, however, a significant tendency in the opposite direction— that of turning means of production into private property; this latter inclination takes a particular form because the means of production are composed of discrete units to which groups of producers have differential access.

III. DIFFERENTIAL ACCESS TO THE MEANS OF PRODUCTION

18. Although the means of production are owned in common, separate units of production possess particular means of production which they put into operation. Possession, though, is a characteristic of the labour process rather than a property right. The essence of property rights is that they are a social relation involving the direction of the use of means of production and of the fruits of that use (Bettelheim, 111). For example, even though the nature and quality of the particular means of production possessed by individual units of production differ, in communism as fully developed all members of society are equally entitled to direct those means of production and to the fruits of their use. Accordingly, the property rights to those means of production belong to society—the means of production in this case are truly social or communist property.

19. Where labour—power is private property, on the other hand, possession of particular means of production by separate units of production means that private interests separate those means of production. If, then, some owners of labour—power are able to secure particular benefits as the result of their differential access to particular means of production, how can we think of those means of production as communist property?

20. Given Marx's emphasis upon a state no longer standing above society as a premise of the co—operative society based upon common ownership of the means of production, it is important to be cautious in comparing concrete experiences with theoretical inferences from Marx. Nevertheless, whether one considers centrally—directed or market—led variants of 'real socialism,' the concrete experiences are instructive— there is a consistent pattern of benefits received by particular groups of producers as the result of their privileged access to particular means of production.

21. In such cases (which include, e.g., the situation of Chinese workers in urban state industries, workers in the tourist sector in Cuba and in the electric power sector in Yugoslavia), those producers fortunate enough to gain access to the particular means of production in question receive benefits (in various forms) based not simply upon their

⁴ A Soviet economist, Efim Manevich, rejected the argument of Y.A. Kronrod and other Soviet economists that since 'the bearer of labour power is the joint owner of state socialist property, he is no longer the owner of his own labour power; like the means of production it belongs to the whole of society and is common property' (Manevich, 1985: 55).

individual contributions but, also, upon the barriers to entry— i.e., the non— universalisability of access to those jobs. In short, they are the beneficiaries of a form of rent— i.e., a property income from other than their labour—power.

22. The experience in Yugoslavia is of particular interest because growing inequalities of income there directly generated discussions of the meaning of social property. Having concluded in 1950 that social property requires the development of self—management by producers, Yugoslavia moved increasingly to reduce controls and regulations over individual enterprises in response to demands from below. It was argued that continuation of petty tutelage and restrictions on enterprise autonomy left producers in a wage—labour relation. ‘He who rules over expanded reproduction, rules society,’ was the Yugoslav saying; and so that workers could rule, taxes on enterprises (which supported state investment) were reduced substantially, leaving workers councils completely independent in dividing (the expanded net) enterprise income into personal income and funds for accumulation. All of this was part, too, of a significant shift to a market—led economy.

23. The result in the 1960s, however, was that already existing inequalities among producers— between firms, industries, town and country and also republics— grew even greater. Not only were some firms and sectors able to distribute more in the form of personal income, but they also reinvested more, thereby creating a basis for greater future disparities. Was this the result of distribution in accordance with contribution? In fact, numerous studies demonstrated the strength of the Yugoslav saying, ‘it’s not what you do, it’s where you do it.’ As Branko Horvat, the leading Yugoslav economist argued in 1971 (Horvat: 1971, 117), the pattern was one of ‘flagrant’ contradictions with the principle of distribution in accordance with work; rather, grossly imperfect markets meant that there was substantial rent generated—not simply classical forms of rent but also what Horvat called ‘technological rent’, the result of exogenous industry—specific differences in the potential for innovation and productivity growth (Horvat: 1971,117; 1982,266). Growing inequalities, in short, were the product of monopolies— the ability to exclude others from particular means of production (and, indeed, as the substantial unemployment indicated, from the means of production in general). Although ‘social property may be legally established,’ Horvat (1982, 238) noted, ‘this difference in incomes or the relative size of

nonlabor income in privileged industries reflects the degree of privatization of social property.’

24. Obviously, an answer was to *tax* those rents (although, in theory, unlimited access to the particular jobs would have a similar effect). By accurately taxing rent and distributing the proceeds of such a tax to members of society regardless of the particular means of production which they possess, two principles would be secured simultaneously — common ownership of the means of production and distribution of income flowing from labour in accordance with contribution. Yet, in Yugoslavia, the matter was not so simple. A strong political reaction against the effects of the market economy led in the 1970s to adoption of a form of social planning based upon the self—managed enterprises but made little progress in dealing with the problem of income which was the result not of the work of collectives ‘but from their more favourable position on the market (extra—profit, rent, etc)’ (Kardelj, 25).

25. Two reasons appear particularly important. For one, given the distinctive Yugoslav political history which had championed self—managed enterprises against domination by state bureaucracies (identified as inherently ‘Stalinist’), there was strong reluctance to resolve the problem ‘through state coercive measures and by means of the policy of taxation’ (Kardelj, 25—6). Perhaps a more general and significant explanation is the inherent tendency to view market results as an objective measure of the contribution of the economic unit in question. Noting the ‘marked social differentiation’ in Yugoslavia,, Jozef Gorjanc (96—7) identified as one of the gravest consequences resulting from a ‘practically unregulated market’ as ‘the attitude of individual work collectives which began to behave on the market as group owners of “their” enterprises. Yet, they had to believe in that way, they were forced to by the logic of commodity—monetary relations.’

IV. RENT AND INFORMATION

26. The emergence of rent is not surprising in the case where we have the combination of an unconscious social mechanism like a market and barriers to entry of producers into specific firms and sectors. Whenever a firm (e.g., an agricultural cooperative) benefits from a favourable market situation, the mystification of the market inevitably produces the

perception that the higher average incomes available result from the specific contribution of the particular producers (and thus constitutes their own entitlement). Theoretically, however, it is not the market as such which produces rent in this case but, rather, the *absence* of a particular market—the market for membership in particular units of production. If, for example, positions in firms were to be auctioned by the state, then presumably any cases in which incomes exceeded the actual contributions of producers would be eliminated by the competition of producers for such positions. The logic of a tax on rents, then, is that of the auction for enterprise membership which eliminates rents.⁵

27. As suggested above, however, the existence of rents was not limited to market—led forms of ‘actually existing socialism’. But, why should rent emerge in the absence of markets? If there is a conscious social mechanism by which the means of production and the benefits to be derived from these are allocated and this mechanism represents the interests of the associated producers as a whole, how can a situation emerge in which there is a mismatch between benefits and contributions? (Recall that, in discussing rent, we are not talking about inequalities which emerge as the result of differences in productive contributions.) Under these conditions, it would appear that only the absence of accurate information can explain the emergence of rent.

28. Yet, there’s no reason to assume that accuracy of information is the norm in the lower phase of communist society. Given the self—interest associated with private ownership of labour—power, the transmission of information which favours particular producers is far from unthinkable. After all, misleading information about the productive capability of particular units of production could permit both a reduced intensity of productive activity and also the use of means of production for personal use.⁶ Under such circumstances, only

⁵ One of Marx’s influences, John Bray, explicitly argued for the importance of ‘intermediate arrangements’ which were not dependent upon an immediate change in human nature. One had to take ‘society as we find it—— with all its irrational habits and prejudices, its ill—arranged and incommensurable habitations and modes of production, its depraved tastes and ignorant appliances of the means of enjoyment’ (Bray: 1968: 129—30, 133, 158, 163—4). His ‘intermediate arrangements’, which called for every company to be ‘open to the admission of persons whose labour had been superseded by machinery,’ would address to some extent this problem of rent (Bray: 1968: 161). So, too, would the apparent proposal of the infamous ‘Herr Duhring’ calling for ‘freedom of movement and obligatory acceptance of new members’ by production units; Engels (1962: 397), whose focus was on fully developed communism, complained that this ‘allows competition among the producers to continue.’

⁶ Manevich (1985: 132, 136) noted that Soviet planning required the setting of accurate labour norms. Yet, the interest of producers as private owners of labour—power acted against the establishment of accurate norms: ‘Higher norms and their

the ability to monitor information and behaviour easily and the willingness to sanction violations can eliminate rent as the result of differential access to particular means of production.

29. Whether there is a conscious social mechanism or a market, it is not a simple matter to prevent the possessors of particular means of production from receiving property income, income which (a) is independent of their own contribution and (b) belongs to other members of society. Those who are the beneficiaries of rent are likely to be relatively concentrated (and are in a position to create power blocs and lobbies) while those who are the losers are likely to be relatively dispersed—and linked only through the medium of the state.⁷ Further, those who possess the means of production also have far superior information about the labour process and the incentive to utilise that information in their own interests.

30. Can the state act effectively on behalf of the members of society against producers who are attempting to maintain their particular *de facto* property ownership? In part, the matter may revolve around the extent to which the state continues to stand above society. If the state retains the ‘systematic and hierarchic division of labour’ that Marx (1871b: 75) saw as characteristic of the capitalist state and if it is ‘an organ standing above society’ rather than ‘one completely subordinate to it’ (Marx, 1875: 30), then the costs to the state in monitoring the possessors of particular means of production and enforcing the interests of the whole society will be high. Not only will validation of the means of production as social property be difficult, but the very attempt to remove rent has the potential for a class struggle in which the state (as in Yugoslavia) is portrayed as distant, bureaucratic, inefficient and destructive of incentive. In such a struggle, it is not difficult to see the potential for the ideological isolation of the state.

systematic review do not answer the direct personal interests of each worker, for every higher standard leads to a certain temporary reduction in individual earnings.’

⁷ Such power blocs and lobbies representing the recipients of rent, indeed, may ‘capture’ the state because of their ability to form effective coalitions.

V. SHARING THE COMMONS

31. How can a society marked by the contradiction between common ownership of the means of production and private ownership of labour—power resolve its inherent problems (in particular, those due to differential access to the means of production)? Perhaps the solution lies in the character of the state that Marx embraced at the time of the Paris Commune. For Marx, the Commune revealed ‘the political form at last discovered under which to work out the economical emancipation of Labour’. Here was ‘the reabsorption of the state power by society as its own living forces instead of as forces controlling and subduing it, by the popular masses themselves, forming their own force instead of the organised force of their suppression—the political form of their social emancipation...’ (Marx, 1871b: 68—9; 1871a: 152—3). All France,’ Marx commented about the Commune project, ‘would have been organized into self—working and self—governing communes’ (Marx, 1871a: 155—6). This profound, decentralised democracy, the ‘self—government of the producers’, which Marx (1871a: 130) described as ‘the people acting for itself by itself,’ was the means by which the producers would transform themselves and circumstances, the way they would make themselves fit to found society anew (Lebowitz, 2003b: 180, 189—96). Could such a state also deal with the particular problems rooted in the combination of common property and self—interest characteristic of socialism?

32. In recent years, a new literature has emerged which challenges conservative arguments that a ‘tragedy of the commons’ is inevitable when common property rights exist. Focusing in particular on the experience with natural resources to which all members of a community have access (e.g., fisheries, irrigation systems, forests, etc.), this work stresses the extent to which common property in practice has been successfully managed (in terms of efficiency and equity) by communities. Critical, however, is the distinction made between ‘open—access resources’ and ‘common—property resources’. In the former case, no property rights are recognised, and there is unrestricted entry; in contrast, common property resources are defined as the property of a well—defined community with a finite membership. Thus, this work pays particular attention to the norms, conventions and

working rules by which such communities have successfully reconciled common property and self—interest.

33. In contrast to a crude neo—classical perspective which identifies the unit of analysis as the atomistic individual with neither past nor future, here the focus is upon the social institutions of the community. In particular, characteristic of communities which have been successful in ‘governing the commons’ is that the community itself is stable; the members who are entitled to draw upon the resource in question ‘have shared a past and expect to share a future. It is important,’ Ostrom (1990: 88) notes, ‘for individuals to maintain their reputations as reliable members of the community.’ Based upon their recognition of a common interest in managing the resource wisely, the members of the community develop rules and norms for appropriating the resource in question; and, they likewise have an interest in effectively monitoring behaviour and sanctioning violations of the community norms. As the result of this process, individuals develop trust and the understanding that they share a common future.

34. What does all this literature have to do with communism? While the focus of this work especially has been upon the way traditional communities have managed their common resources, the tension between common resources and individual self—interest in those communities bears a definite resemblance to the characteristic of communism before it stands upon its own foundations. So, it is worth exploring whether the solutions identified in this literature have any applicability to the problems of the combination of common ownership of the means of production and private ownership of labour—power.

35. Come back to the question of the emergence of rent as the result of differential access to the means of production. We’ve noted that the problem of obtaining accurate information is significant for a state that stands over and above society. But what if, e.g., the taxation of rent were assigned to local communities— thereby making local communities the effective owners of the means of production possessed by economic units? The tension between producers who receive rent from the particular means of production that they possess and the state would remain. Yet, insofar as those producers are simultaneously citizens of those communities and both share a past and expect to share a future with other local residents, the local state would not be viewed as alien in its attempt to exercise its property rights in

the means of production. Accordingly, it may be anticipated that information, monitoring and enforcement costs would be greatly reduced— compared to the same efforts if conducted by central state agencies.

36. Nevertheless, so long as those producers continue to look upon their labour—power as their personal property, differing perspectives over the extent of the equivalent for their activity are inevitable. Thus, despite the community’s relative ease in monitoring, conflicts over rent are inherent by—products of the continuing private ownership of labour—power. The assignment of property rights over the means of production to the local community, however, does not only reduce enforcement costs; it also contains within it the basis for going beyond the historical presupposition of communism as it initially emerges. Assume that the community resources obtained are used to support distribution on the basis of need— and that the category of use—values available to each individual ‘in his capacity as a member of society’ includes not only those which Marx (1962: 22) identified as ‘intended for the common satisfaction of needs, such as schools, health services, etc.’ but would be expanded ‘in proportion as the new society develops.’ With the community as the locus of activity, all its members are transparently the beneficiaries of common ownership of the means of production, and communal needs and purposes increasingly direct productive activity.

37. Yet, as the literature on common property stresses, before the commons can be successfully shared, the community must develop arrangements and understandings that encourage cooperation and provide assurance to community members that others are cooperating. In particular, it must be clear who is a member of the community— i.e., those who have a right to appropriate resources from the particular commons. If anyone can come to draw upon the stock of community resources (i.e., the case of ‘open access’), then it may be rational for individual community members to extract as much as they can immediately in their own self—interest. Even with a clearly defined membership, however, agreements within the community would be necessary both with respect to the rules of appropriation and also to the penalties for violations in order to convince individuals that cooperation is rational. Because of the costs of communication, decision—making and monitoring, it is logical that the unit of organisation of the community be small in order to facilitate

coordination (Ostrom, 1992: 297—9; Pinkerton, 1994: 2373). Thus, organisation at the neighbourhood level may best ensure the development of the mutual trust and reciprocity that is necessary to avoid a ‘tragedy of the commons’.

38. In short, given that we are not assuming the pre—existence of producers who, ‘by education, tradition and habit’ look upon common property as common sense, successful sharing of common property requires the development of ‘institutional forms, procedures and habits which either coerce or persuade private agents to conform to its schemas’— i.e., an appropriate ‘mode of regulation’.⁸ Just as capitalism needed ‘artificial means’ and ‘the power of the state’ until the development of the specifically capitalist mode of production produced a working class which looked upon capital’s requirements ‘as self—evident natural laws’, so also does communism need the development of social norms which lead producers to identify their self—interest with co—operation (Marx, 1977: 899, 937; Lebowitz, 1991).

39. In the same way that capitalism, though, is not stable unless it produces workers consistent with its requirements, so also is communism not stable until it produces its own premises— i.e., until it rests upon its own foundations. Even though local institutional agreements may induce forms of cooperation that foster solidarity and strengthen the social relation of self—governing producers, such arrangements in themselves are fragile so long as we do not yet have the production of producers who look upon common property as common sense.

VI. BEYOND THE COMMUNITY

40. There is a definite logic behind Marx’s stress upon a decentralised state composed of ‘self—working and self—governing communes’ as the means of creating the new society. It is not simply that this self—government of the producers can involve all members of society ‘because the thing starts with self—government of the township’ (Tucker, 1978: 545); it is also that through such a state (society’s ‘own living forces’) the local agreements and understandings which are necessary for common property and higher forms of

⁸ Use of the terminology of the Regulation School is meant to indicate agreement with the importance they assign to the social norms carried by individuals but not with their particular arguments (Lipietz, 1987: 33; 1988: 18—9).

distribution can be developed. In this invading communist society from below, people produce for each other within different relations and they simultaneously produce themselves as members of a communist society.

41. Nevertheless, it should be obvious that the individual community in and of itself cannot resolve the problem generated by the combination of the private ownership of labour—power and the common ownership of means of production. In this emphasis upon local communities as the owners of means of production, the problem of differential access to particular means of production has not disappeared—it is simply displaced to the communities in which those means of production are located. Simply stated, some communities receive rent—members of those communities receive more than their contribution. Despite the development of solidarity *within* those communities, the differences between rich and poor communities, between the advantaged and disadvantaged, threaten the stability of those internal relations.

42. How can these differences be resolved without reproducing much of the behaviour described earlier? If the differences are to be levelled through taxation by an external state, the problem of asymmetric information for taxation by a state over and above society reappears. If, alternatively, free movement of people between communities is the way in which the effects of differential access to means of production are extinguished, then common resources may be transformed into open access resources, renewing the potential for a tragedy of the commons. Whatever the source of regional inequalities, if the problem is left to the spontaneous solution of markets or to compulsion, the tendency will be toward the disintegration of solidarity within communities. Those relations of solidarity within individual communities necessarily must be nested within a larger system which supports them (Ostrom, 1990).

43. Although the way in which the elements of a communist society are assembled as it emerges ('economically, morally and intellectually, still stamped with the birth marks of the old society') is a matter of contingency, the full development of a society based upon solidarity and communist property (locally, nationally and, indeed, internationally) necessarily is the result of a process. The 'becoming' of a communist society occurs as that society deals consciously with the 'defects' inherent in its beginnings. That process, it is

suggested here, develops organically by beginning at the neighbourhood and community level but continues, however, only by building solidarity directly between rich and poor communities— both within and between individual nations.⁹

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⁹ For a discussion of this question on a global level, see Lebowitz (2002, 2003a).

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