

Practicing Communism Makes Perfect: The Practical Communism Principle

When it comes right down to it, communism is all about living the good life. Crucially though, communism is premised on the idea that the most authentically fulfilling existence for any one individual can only be attained when everybody else is equally able to achieve the fullest of expression in their own lives. As Marx expressed it, the credo of communist society would be: "the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all."

Accordingly, first, last and always, Stand will strive to overthrow capitalism and institute communism. Yet, while we will never give up this goal, there is no way for us to know when it will be accomplished and we certainly cannot be sure that this epochal change will take place anytime soon. Moreover, at any given stage in this struggle we will surely find it very difficult if not impossible to ascertain how much progress we have made along the revolutionary road.

Furthermore, we must recognize that, this side of the revolution, capitalism will always emerge victorious in the final analysis. We may win an engagement now and then but overall capital will emerge triumphant. To suppose otherwise is really to say that capitalism is reformable; and in that case, why would we need a revolution?

Stand's task is undeniably daunting. How then do we propose to keep up our spirits in the face of inevitable and recurrent setbacks? How can we remain resolute in spite of such adversity?

The answer, for Stand, is practical communism. We believe that it is not enough for revolutionists to foment resistance to capitalism, building for the day when the working class can break the power of the bourgeoisie; we must also labour, actively and consciously, to make our lives as we want them to be.

Practical communism requires that, as Stand members, we must strive always to act in accordance with our ideological commitments. This is not, however, a question of lifestyle politics. Stand does not concern itself with whether its members buy local or eat organic. Practicing communism is about public and collective effort, not the private choices of individuals in their personal lives. It entails thinking through any action we propose to take as an organization and asking ourselves if it is consistent with our professed beliefs about the world.

Practical communism will inform all aspects of Stand's activity. It means, e.g., that we must treat one another respectfully in meetings, encouraging all members to contribute to discussions and decisions rather than allowing proceedings to be dominated by those who are most comfortable speaking in a group. It means that we must be attentive to how sexism, racism, homophobia and other systems of oppression distort the lives of all people in our society, and strive always to recognize, resist and rise above the harmful patterns that these prejudices instil in each of us. It means that we must be nuanced and strategic in our thinking, understanding that championing the working class does not mean that we must support the actions of all workers in all instances. It means, finally, putting energy into positive projects just as much as into resistance work.

Marx always emphasized that capitalism was a totalizing system. This process is very far advanced in our own day. Not only does it mean, as in Marx's time, that we are forced to sell

our labour in alienated form merely to survive, but that even outside of work we find virtually all relations reduced to what he called the "fetishism of commodities." So many vital aspects of our existence, such as food, education, culture and even taking physical care of others, such as the elderly, have all been or are being reduced to a cash nexus.

Capitalism now subsumes our whole world. We cannot separate ourselves from it; we can only strive to overcome it. Stand recognizes this reality but through positive projects will seek in small ways to win back some of the aspects of human life that capitalism steals from us. We intend, as best we may, to meet our common and genuine needs without recourse to, and indeed in opposition to, the circuits of capital.

There are any number of potential positive projects. These could include growing food, constructing shelter, providing education, and on and on. The key elements are that the activity provide a meaningful benefit and that it be carried out not merely without recourse to capitalist mechanisms, but as a conscious form of resistance to capitalism.

Practical communism, and more specifically positive projects, hold out the possibility that we will not be acting as isolated individuals. If Stand can become, or integrate with, a community, we can hope to build some approximation of communism even now, under capitalism.

Marx explained that labour that is communally organized and whose product is freely available to all is the very essence of communism; it is the working-out of humanity's innermost species-being. A positive project, then, can be communism made real, if only in an attenuated and temporary form. Positive projects can serve as the most vivid possible public demonstration of what we stand for even as they further our own internal development. This indeed is the true practice of communism.