

Utopian

Perspectives



By Ron Tabor

I. I propose that those of us currently involved in the *Utopian* put some thought and effort into building and consolidating what appears to be a growing milieu around our publication. Our goal, for the short and medium term at least, should be to create a network of writers/scholars, activists, readers, and financial supporters around the *Utopian*. This would involve, as it already has, communicating among ourselves via email, telephone, and in-person conversations, and encouraging people to write for the *Utopian* on current issues and theoretical topics. Specifically, we should: (1) ask the newer people around us to submit material for publication; (2) seek to include more short articles around topics of current import than we have in the past; and (3) encourage those of us who are active in organizing situations to write reports on what they are doing and thinking.

We should also aim to hold a meeting, perhaps an expanded gathering of the editorial board, sometime in the future, most likely next summer. Depending on the turnout, this meeting might become a kind of conference devoted to future perspectives of the *Utopian* and its network. I am not suggesting that we aim to reconstitute the RSL or some other organization of a hierarchical, Leninist type. My vision, in so far as I have one, is to utilize the *Utopian* as the political center of an expanding group—a network or milieu—of people who are thinking generally along the same lines and who communicate with each other and discuss, and when necessary, vote to establish common positions on, questions of contemporary political interest.

III. I envision this network as being built around what might be called “programmatic” and “strategic” unity. To help clarify what I mean by this, it might be worth describing what I believe this should not entail.

A. First, I do not think we should attempt to organize this milieu around “theoretical” unity. By theoretical unity, I mean political agreement on issues of philosophical and methodological import, such as “idealism vs materialism,” “the nature and structure of history,” “human nature,” etc. Leaving aside the question of whether this type of unity is ever real or even possible (as opposed to being a façade or coerced—that is, people pretending to believe what they do not agree with or even understand), I no longer believe such unity is desirable. Thus, while it is often enjoyable to discuss these issues among ourselves, I do not think we should expect that our milieu as a whole should take formal positions on them. At this stage in our lives, we all have different notions about these “deep” questions, and instead of trying to pretend that this isn’t so, or shouldn’t be so, we should accept it and value it. As part of our opposition to attempting to achieve theoretical unity, we should not define our network as being explicitly atheistic or in opposition to all forms of religious belief. Instead, we seek broad agreement on professed and underlying values, whatever their specific philosophical and/or religious sources may be.

B. Second, I do not think we ought to try to organize ourselves around “tactical” unity, that is, agreement about the specific approaches that those of us who are active in various movement milieus and other organizing situations take during the course of this work. Instead, we should leave such tactics to those directly involved in this type of activity. This does not mean that we should not discuss these issues; those who would like the input of others on their current work



should certainly feel comfortable enough to ask for it; but we should not seek to establish a tactical “line” on such organizing efforts. Of course, there may arrive occasions in which it is necessary that our network/milieu as a whole adopt a specific tactical orientation, such as an attitude to take toward a given struggle or set of demands or whether to orient to a given milieu or organization and how we might do so. In such situations, we should aim to come to common agreement, if this possible, on our approach.

III. By programmatic and strategic unity, I mean that we should attempt to establish common positions on our attitudes toward broadly defined contemporary issues, specifically, what our goals are and how we propose to achieve them. Such a program might include (I have not attempted to make separate lists of programmatic and strategic questions):

A. Opposition to capitalism.

B. In favor of anarchism/revolutionary socialism/libertarian socialism, defined as a democratic, cooperative, and egalitarian society organized on a decentralized, non-hierarchical basis. I personally do not wish to engage in extensive debates over which term—anarchism, libertarian socialism, revolutionary socialism, etc.—we choose, as long as we make it clear that by “socialism,” we do not mean either capitalist welfare states, such as the New Deal or the social democratic capitalisms that currently exist in the Scandinavian countries, or the totalitarian state capitalist societies of the former Soviet Union, China, Vietnam, Cuba, etc. These kinds of “socialism” entail the substantial expansion of the state. Our vision, in stark contrast, entails the drastic reduction and ultimate elimination of the state.

C. The necessity of a revolution to establish such a society, as opposed to piecemeal reform. By revolution, we do not necessarily mean an extremely violent, protracted process. In fact, we would like the revolution to be as non-violent as possible. But we don’t believe that what we seek can be achieved a without a mass mobilization of millions of people who overthrow existing conditions rather rapidly and institute their own direct and democratic control over the economy and society as a whole.

D. That this revolution occur through the direct action of the vast majority of people, the working class (including the homeless and the unemployed), small farmers (where they still exist), and the majority of the middle class (as long as they do not seek to dominate the movement) against the tiny elite/class that currently runs society, and does not entail a small group of people seizing power in the name and supposed interests of the working class and oppressed people.

E. Opposition to the establishment of a centralized, supposedly revolutionary, state that seeks to nationalize the means of production and the instruments of coercion in its hands, as a “necessary” prelude to the establishment of socialism.

F. We reject the notion that the liberated society we wish to establish is the necessary, inevitable outcome of prior history and/or of the economic “laws of motion” of capitalism. Instead, we see our goal as an ethical or moral demand, something we believe to be in the interests of the vast majority of people on our planet, and of our planet itself, and we argue for it on this basis.



G. Opposition to both the neo-liberalism (“free market fetishism”) of modern conservatism and the reformist New Deal liberalism (fetishism of state intervention) of the capitalist liberals and much of the left.

H. Support for struggles for partial reforms and for the organizations that exist or are formed to achieve these, such as the trade unions, neighborhood and civic organizations, etc.

I. Support for the struggle to achieve equal rights (including voting rights) and full liberation for Black people; against police brutality, segregation, discrimination, state-sponsored and non-state sponsored racist violence, mass incarceration, etc., and for the independent organizations and demands that address the specific needs of Blacks, Latinos, Asians, indigenous peoples, Jews, Muslims, and all other groups subject to specific oppressive treatment. For full rights and citizenship for all immigrants, legal and so-called “illegal.” Amnesty for all. For an open border.

J. Support for the rights, and for the full liberation, of women, including equal pay and promotional opportunities, family leave time, access to birth control and other forms of family planning, the right to control their own bodies, including broad rights and access to abortion, for militant defense against domestic abuse, rape, and violence against women.

K. Full rights for LGBTQ people, including the right to marry and adopt children, defense against physical assault and discrimination, for equal promotional opportunities.

L. We support the struggle to protect/reclaim the environment from the destructive effects of capitalism, against global warming, and to promote the transition from the use of fossil fuels to renewable energy sources.

M. Opposition to US and West European imperialism. An end to US intervention in the Middle East, North Africa, and elsewhere. Defense of the rights of all peoples to self-determination, including the Palestinians and the Kurds. Opposition to Zionism and the Zionist state. Opposition to Russian imperialism and support of the Ukrainians and other peoples against the encroachment of Russian expansionism. Opposition to Chinese imperialism/expansion in the South China Sea and elsewhere. We wholeheartedly support struggles for national liberation and in defense of oppressed nations against imperialist aggression, even if these struggles are led by authoritarian or even totalitarian states and organizations, but while doing so, we do not pretend that such states and organizations are socialist or anarchist. Instead, we advocate and support the struggles of the oppressed people living under or being led by such forces to struggle against them as they see fit and to overthrow them and establish anarchist/libertarian socialist societies.

N. Opposition to the “national security state” and against government spying on individuals and organizations. Full civil liberties for all. Full amnesty for whistle-blowers.

O. Opposition to both US capitalist parties, Democrat and Republican. Specifically, while we oppose



The Utopian

the conservative, obviously anti-working class Republican Party, we firmly reject the notion that the Democratic Party represents the interests of working class and oppressed people. Instead, we view it as being a party controlled by the more liberal members of the capitalist elite who seek to mobilize people behind their (limited) program and work to prevent mass mobilizations from going beyond the system. Our aim should not be to support such a party, including its self-proclaimed “populist” or “socialist” wings, but to expose it as the anti-working class force it is, if not to destroy it altogether. While we do not wish to monitor the individual voting behavior of the members and supporters of our milieu/network, as a group we are in public opposition to any kind of strategic orientation to the Democratic Party and to supporting its candidates, no matter how “progressive” they claim to be.

P. More broadly, consistent with our advocacy of direct action, we generally oppose electoral politics—that is, organizing in and focusing on the electoral/political arena—as a way to achieve, or even to propagandize for, our goals. We do not think such a strategy, and certainly not by itself, can lead to liberation, given that the political parties and the political system as a whole are controlled by the rich and serve the needs of capitalism. We are also critical of electoral politics because they promote the illusion that the solution to society’s problems can be achieved by electing and relying on leaders or representatives who will “do things for the people.” Instead, we believe that the revolutionary transformation we seek, if it is indeed possible, can only be achieved by mass struggle, the direct action of the people themselves.

Q. We believe it is crucial for us to explicitly raise and elaborate our revolutionary libertarian vision. Rather than hide our view and attempt to cajole or manipulate people into fighting for what we advocate, we openly proclaim and emphasize our maximal program: we seek to overthrow capitalism and replace it with a truly democratic, cooperative, and egalitarian society, revolutionary, libertarian socialism or anarchy.

IV. We welcome all individuals from whatever social background, nationality, race, gender, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, and occupation to join and/or to otherwise support our milieu/network. Specifically, we are not aiming to build a milieu that consists solely or primarily of either theoreticians, on the one hand, or of revolutionary organizers or activists, on the other. While we greatly esteem organizing activity and the dedicated activists who carry it out, we equally value serious intellectual work—and the scholars who pursue it—that serves the cause of human liberation.

V. After many years, a mass leftwing movement appears to be growing. It is mobilizing around various struggles—among them, against police brutality and racist violence, against rape and violence against women, for LGBTQ rights, for a \$15 minimum wage, against the Zionist dispossession and oppression of the Palestinians in the form of the Boycott, Divest, and Sanction movement, against environmental destruction and for renewable energy, for full rights for all immigrants, in defense of the right to bear arms. This is occurring in the context, and is in fact the proximate cause, of a general leftward shift in US society, after many years in which the right wing has been on the offensive. At the moment, the mass movement is largely orienting to the Democratic Party. It is to be hoped that as the movement picks up steam, a significant section of it will break from that party and seek to organize against it. We wish to promote such a development. Hopefully, our milieu will be able to play some kind of role in this.



The Utopian

