

Socialist Communes and Anti-Imperialism

The Marxist Approach

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“The direct antithesis to the empire was the Commune.”

—KARL MARX, *The Civil War in France*

Israel’s genocidal war on Gaza, which has gone hand in hand with ruthless assaults on the West Bank, Lebanon, Iran, Yemen, and Syria, all of it enthusiastically backed and bankrolled by the United States, has served as a wake-up call to people around the world about the devastating effects of imperialism. Carried out with the complicity of all the Western governments, the genocide should also open our eyes to the larger, U.S.-led imperialist system. That system, even when not waging outright war against countries of the Global South, places most under a sort of generalized siege, sometimes through sanctions (for example, Venezuela, Cuba, Nicaragua, China, and Iran) or hemming them in with military bases (as in the cases of China, North Korea, and Venezuela, among others), to say nothing of imperialism’s systematic drain of value and material resources from such countries, which has devastating social and environmental effects.

Given this context, in which imperialism versus oppressed nations and peoples clearly represents the principal contradiction, one could well wonder about the importance of a socialist commune. Why discuss communes at all? What do communes have to do with the urgent struggle against imperialism, which is evidently the central struggle today? Even more troublingly, one could point out how the imperialist-Zionist project has itself deployed communes, the kibbutzim, to colonize Palestinian territory, arming them with militias to extirpate and exterminate Palestinians in its settler-colonialist project. A few of these kibbutz-communes were targets – understandable targets, given the right of a colonized people to fight its oppressors – of the Hamas-led Operation Al-Aqsa Flood in 2023.¹ There are also communal organizations elsewhere in the world that, while not being settler-colonialist like the kibbutzim, nevertheless

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have difficulty seeing beyond their autonomous territory, thereby hindering their participation in broader projects of national liberation from imperialist domination. For all these reasons, it would be understandable if socialist communes were not seen to be a priority in the crucial struggle against imperialism, the central challenge of our time.

One person who feels otherwise, and seems to do so very strongly, is the celebrated Palestinian revolutionary Leila Khaled. Last November, Khaled came to Caracas as part of an antifascist, pro-Palestine event organized by the Bolivarian government. Once there, she went almost immediately to El Panal Commune in the working-class 23 de Enero barrio. Speaking to the communards and members of the public gathered there, she expressed her enthusiasm and admiration for the commune. She noted how that 20-year-old project, like other communes in Venezuela, was taking concrete steps toward securing the very sovereignty that her people on the other side of the ocean were also struggling for at that moment. Despite U.S. aggressions, the communes had helped Venezuelans to be “free in their territory.”² Khaled’s words were moving, while her heartfelt and also highly informed anti-imperialism was echoed by the assembled communards of El Panal, who pointed out the similarities between the struggles in Venezuela and Palestine. Some even expressed a desire to join the Palestinian resistance movement, following in the longstanding tradition of militant internationalism in the 23 de Enero barrio, but Khaled thought their work was so important that they should stay. For Khaled and the communards at El Panal, then, the communal project they had built was virtually synonymous with anti-imperialist struggle. The question remains, however, what is the connection between anti-imperialism and the making of a socialist commune? When and where does a commune qualify as anti-imperialist, and how can communes fit into the larger strategy of socialist anti-imperialism that leftists, particularly those of the Marxist variety, pursue in the world? These are questions that this article will try to answer.

Contemporary Communal Projects

Worldwide, but especially in Latin America, there is currently much interest in communes just as there are, even more importantly, actual projects of communal construction. Some of the most compelling examples of the latter are the efforts to build communal socialism or “*socialismo comunitario*” (communitary socialism) that have emerged in Venezuela and Bolivia respectively. In Venezuela, President Hugo Chávez proposed in 2009 that Venezuelan socialism – a project initiated three years earlier – would be built based on communes as its “basic cells” of democratic self-government and collective production. In Bolivia, the *process of change*

that began in 2006 and has roots in both the country's Indigenous resistance and its workers' struggles also proposed a variant of communitary socialism. Connected to the concept of *buen vivir*, Bolivia's socialism was to be built relying on Indigenous communes, or *ayllus*, as one of its main "levers." A parallel can be found in Brazil's Landless Workers' Movement (MST), which struggles for agrarian reform by occupying land and subsequently establishing communal living and production arrangements called *acampamentos* and *assentamentos*. Although a social movement, MST has long defended the goal of building a sovereign nation in the face of imperialism, and since 1990 has included socialism as one of its strategic aims. These are, in my opinion, some of the most promising examples.

Yet, both the discourse and the practice of commune-building can be highly ambivalent in relation to projects of socialist construction and national liberation. Sometimes, a community-based project that makes radical claims to autonomy, often influenced by autonomist, postmodern, or anarchist theory, can fail to embody a viable process of national liberation from imperialism, or may turn its back on existing ones. This is undoubtedly part of the history of neo-Zapatismo (Zapatista Army of National Liberation, EZLN) in Chiapas and is also a frequent criticism leveled at Kurdish autonomous communities.³ Further, community-level work is often promoted by nongovernmental organizations precisely to avoid larger issues such as land reform and national sovereignty in the face of imperialism. In what follows, with the goal of determining when and where a socialist commune qualifies as anti-imperialist, I will look at Karl Marx's own reflections on the commune, which took on greater centrality in his vision of social change in his last years, taking them to be a kind of model for what it is to be a socialist, anti-imperialist commune. My aim will be to show how these reflections by Marx, despite being most fully developed in his last period (1870–1883), are nevertheless connected to his whole theoretical apparatus and project. That project involves a revolutionary intervention in the state, followed by a transformation of the whole economy and society, and it is by its very nature opposed to imperialism. Thus, if communes are assumed in the way defended by Marx, they will be part of an unfolding anticapitalist and anti-imperialist strategy.

The argument will proceed by showing, first, how Marx's best-known reflections on traditional or agrarian communes, such as those found in the *Ethnological Notebooks* and his late letters and drafts to Vera Zasulich, went hand in hand with his defense of colonized, peripheral peoples against capitalist expansion. This is an aspect of Marxism that Rosa Luxemburg picked up on, with impressive sensitivity to the colonial question. However, Marx went further than her by endorsing the rural com-

munne as a basis for socialism in a project of national liberation, even as he laid out very clear conditions under which this could happen. In the second step, I will show how Marx's claim that the commune could be a building block of socialism, even if it is most evident in the work of what can be called the "late Marx" (1870–1883), does not represent a break with his overall *oeuvre*. Many have been tempted to celebrate this late period of Marx as something sharply distinguished from the rest of his work, with echoes of the "epistemological rupture" once claimed in relation to the young Marx.⁴ In fact, however, Marx's late-life defense of the rural commune grew out of the very centerpiece of Marxist theory: the discussion of value relations in his critique of political economy that he carried out in the midcentury. Moreover, since Marx's value-centered theoretical apparatus unfolds to include other categories used to construct a critique of the concentration of capital, monopoly formation, and the world market, it follows that Marx's fundamental alternative to commodity exchange – which was communal production since at least the late 1850s – cannot be separated from his fully developed critique of capitalism and its expansionist, imperialist tendency. Nor can it be separated from the strategies Marx sketched for the working class in the capitalist world system, such as the project of national emancipation that he thought was embodied, even if imperfectly, in the Paris Commune. In the final section, I will look at how the Venezuelan and Bolivian conceptions of communal or communitary socialism, each in its own way, coincide with the Marxist strategic vision of a communal project, which is not a matter of building isolated or radically autonomous communes, or even networks of communes, but rather involves integrating them into strategic national projects that oppose imperialism. The same holds for MST's project of a "people's agrarian reform" that emphasizes communal organization and cooperativism, but operates within an overall anti-imperialist, anticapitalist framework.

The "Late Marx" Was a Tricontinental Marx

There are numerous investigations that look at the last period of Marx, in which he studied and defended communal forms as a possible basis for socialist construction. Some authors go so far as to hail this as a discovery, announcing the appearance of a new and heretofore unknown Marx.⁵ Yet, despite this enthusiasm for Marx's last period, it is rarely sufficiently emphasized that Marx's reflections on rural communes at that time almost always focused on the periphery of the capitalist world system: the Russian countryside, the Indian village, the Algerian peasant community, and the Indigenous communities of North and South America.

Marx's work on rural communal life during his late period is scattered across notes, drafts, and correspondence. For example, the discussion of the Russian rural commune appears in his 1877 unsent "Letter to the Editorial Board of *Otechestvennye Zapiski*," his letter and drafts to Vera Zasulich, and his notes on Maxim Kovalevsky's work. His reflections on the Algerian peasant community appear in a series of letters written during Marx's last trip, taken for health reasons, to the city of Algiers in 1882 and also in the notes on Kovalevsky. In this period, Marx also took notes on Indian land tenure, which had been a longstanding interest of his, and on Australian Aboriginal social organization, based on an ethnographic work by Richard Bennett.⁶ Despite the wide-reaching diversity of these materials and the breadth of Marx's studies at this time, they all have one thing in common: the communal forms he was studying are all located on the frontiers of capitalist expansion and – it is important to add – were sites of anticolonial resistance.

In Marx's notes on such agrarian communities, he highlighted not only how they came under attack by expanding capitalism but also how they proved resilient in defending themselves against it. He consistently pointed to indigenous resistance, even as he criticized the colonizers in no uncertain terms. In Algeria, Marx noted how the French colonialists, with their "barefaced arrogance," expropriated the Arabs with a view to providing French settlers with more land and to "break the strength of the clan unions."⁷ Yet the Algerian people were not passive, and Marx noted with approval how their collective land tenure had resisted such onslaughts. Looking at India, Marx called the colonizers' suppression of communal ownership "an act of English vandalism, pushing the native people not forwards but backwards."⁸ At the same time, Marx consistently pointed out that such village communes had outlived all kinds of invaders over the centuries, and he celebrated Indian rebellions against those he called "British dogs" and "asses."⁹ Marx's studies of the peasant commune in Russia are the most extensive ones he carried out on agrarian communities anywhere.¹⁰ They led him to acknowledge the possibility of a rural commune in a peripheral context becoming a fulcrum of socialist construction. However, he also pointed out that this would require overthrowing the Tsarist state that was subordinated to Western powers, and which fostered only dependent growth through "the domiciliation of certain businesses."¹¹ Remarking on the late Marx's focus on resistant communities in Asia, Africa, and the Americas, Argentinian author Néstor Kohan once quipped that in Marx's reflections on rural communities in the periphery he was developing a "Tricontinental" *avant la lettre*, alluding to the anti-imperialist conference organized in revolutionary Cuba in the

next century.¹² This Tricontinental spirit, very much present in Marx, is precisely what is lacking in so much that is published about Marx's late investigations into the rural commune.

Although most interpreters have underplayed the anticolonial character of Marx's late work on communes, there is a second-generation Marxist who pursued an analogous line of thought. This is Rosa Luxemburg, who took deep interest in the peoples and nations in what is today called the Global South. If Luxemburg's reflections closely parallel those of the late Marx, this is because of her similar method, interests, and sources, for she did not have access to Marx's notes and drafts from his last years, which only later became available. Most of Luxemburg's work on the social formations and lifeways of noncapitalist peoples and nations appears in her underrecognized book, *Introduction to Political Economy*, based on the courses that she gave in the school of the Social Democratic Party (SPD) beginning in 1907. The book makes an impressive sweep of what is now called the Global South. For example, it considers the Indian village community and its diverse manifestations, noting that "the property of the land corresponded simply to the Indian peasant communities who had worked it over the millennia...a great social culture, in which the land is not a means for exploiting the labor of others, but simply the foundation of the existence of the working people themselves."¹³ The book also analyzes what Luxemburg called "agrarian communism" in Peru and Mexico, which she contended was the dominant precolonial form in those contexts.¹⁴ When Luxemburg turned to North Africa, she celebrated the resilient communal property relations of Arab and Berber peoples and their "stubborn resistance" to "the grip of European capital."¹⁵

While following closely in the late Marx's footsteps (though in great measure unbeknownst to her), Luxemburg also coincided with the late Marx in giving an overall positive evaluation of what she understood to be instances of original communism or, in her words, "communist institutions." The contradiction between such communal forms and capitalist expansion is also part of Luxemburg's account. For example, she noted that colonial conquest leads to a "violent abolition of common property" resulting in the destruction of "the communistic community."¹⁶ Her message, which can be seen retroactively through the lens of her "*Socialism or Barbarism*" slogan, was that capitalism acts barbarically in its expansion around the world and in its treatment of noncapitalist peoples and their communities. Far from bringing progress, the effect of capitalist expansion was simply harmful, with "the old ties being annihilated and replaced with disputes, discord, inequality, and exploitation."¹⁷ What Luxemburg brought out, and is completely resonant with Marx's late work, is the anticolonial, anti-imperialist

character and potential of the commune. That is to say, both the late Marx and Luxemburg examined rural communes at the frontiers of capitalist expansion – where the dynamic of expropriation is often felt as much as exploitation – and both theorists understood such communities to be resilient sites of resistance to capitalism.

Nuclei of Socialism, but with Conditions and Context

Luxemburg's investigations were carried out in an extremely inimical context, marked by the SPD leadership's generally apologetic attitude toward colonialism.¹⁸ This made her defense of colonized peoples, and her celebration of the resistance they maintained from their "communitistic" communities, all the more impressive. She was also aware of the potential connections between the anticolonial struggles in the periphery and those of the working class in the core countries, observing that the European bourgeoisie had sensed "a connection between the ancient communist survivals that put up stubborn resistance in the colonial countries...and the new [revolutionary] gospel of...the proletarian mass in the old capitalist countries."¹⁹ It could even be argued that Luxemburg's extensive reflections on the communities of the periphery, for whom capitalist expansion was not merely a labor issue but an existential threat, implicitly highlighted the revolutionary agency of the peoples of the periphery and their communities. Even so, Luxemburg failed to take the additional step of allowing that the agrarian commune or Indigenous community could become building blocks of a new socialist society. Here Marx's analysis, perhaps because of the greater importance he gave to national self-determination, surpassed hers, since he took the step of affirming in his last years that such communes had the potential to be fulcrums ("*points de appui*") of social regeneration, or cells of socialism. However, realizing that potential came with some conditions, if it were to occur – that is, if the rural commune were to contribute to modern socialism.

What kinds of conditions are we talking about? These we can see clearest in Marx's discussion of the existing communal formation that he most fully studied and had the most information about: the *obshchina* of Russia. His viewpoint was expressed in his "Letter to the Editorial Board of *Otechestvennyye Zapiski*" (1877), the letter and drafts to Zasulich (1881), and the 1882 preface to the Russian translation of the *Communist Manifesto*, which was written by Frederick Engels but had Marx's approval. In these documents, Marx took the time to sketch how a commune, with collective ownership and some degree of internal self-government, could fit into a strategy of socialist transition and national liberation in a pe-

ripheral country. One issue was the productive forces: Marx argued that the commune had to incorporate the technological achievements of the capitalist system, for which he felt the Russian commune was particularly suited because, as a late communal form that was not based mainly on kinship relations, it was “capable of broader development.”²⁰ It could thus easily replace “fragmented agriculture with large-scale, machine-assisted agriculture.” These new productive forces were also important because they would allow the commune to go “from fragmented to collective labor,” collective labor being particularly important in Marx’s perspective on communal production.²¹

A second issue was that the communes needed to be connected among each other. According to Marx, it was “a debilitating feature” that the existing obshchinas were “localized microcosms,” and he even suggested that their isolation was the “natural basis for” despotism.²² Third, there had to be a political revolution that would transform the existing state and establish a new relation to the communes in what was essentially a process of national liberation. Marx perceived that late nineteenth-century Russia was what we would today call a “dependent state.” Like many third-world states today, the tsarist regime developed only “certain branches of the Western capitalist system” that were most “easily acclimated.”²³ Rather than aiding Russia’s rural communes, that dependent state fostered a host of parasites, usurers, and speculative capitalists.²⁴ (Marx called them “capitalist pests,” and they roughly coincide with the comprador bourgeoisie in third-world social formations today.)

Overall, when we look at Marx’s relatively developed discussion of the Russian commune, we can see how Marx saw in it not socialist *perfection* but socialist *potential*. He recognized the rural commune to be a site of internal contradictions – including emergent hierarchies – that was therefore undergoing ongoing evolution. Hence, if Marx affirmed that the obshchina could be a starting point for a socialist system, he was careful not to fall into romantic idealizations or isolate it from strategic and geopolitical considerations.²⁵ For example, he recognized the need to replace the communes’ traditional *volost* assemblies, headed by male elders, “with a peasant assembly chosen by the communes themselves.”²⁶ Likewise, he conditioned his defense of the Russian commune on its being integrated with strategic concerns, specifically a national revolutionary process, with which it would need to be embedded. This was because, as Marx said, the commune’s “further development merges with the general course of Russian society.” Marx’s lapidary conclusion was: “To save the Russian commune, there must be a Russian Revolution.”²⁷

Marx's Critique of Political Economy Appeals to Communal Control

The idea that the late Marx represents an unknown, distinct Marx points to a desire to separate Marx into two.²⁸ From the dream factories of fashionable Marxism, we are sometimes encouraged to believe that there is a more-up-to-date, ecological (even “degrowth”), decolonial, and community-friendly Marx who emerged around 1870, that can be contrasted with the grim “middle-Marx” who wrote about class, political economy, state power, and political parties and is probably stagist and “Stalinist” to boot. This presumed separation is suspicious in itself. Does it not point to a desire to promote an “updated” Marx, focused on communities, that is separated both from Marx’s own critique of capitalism and from Marxism’s later analysis of imperialism? Does not this risk repeating the gesture by which the allegedly more humanist Marx of the 1844 *Manuscripts* was used to fuel strands of Western Marxism that distanced themselves from the contributions and learning processes of really existing socialism, often even rejecting the Marxist critique of imperialism? I believe that it does. Yet it also relies on a textually spurious interpretation. For the interest in the communal form goes back early in Marx and permeates the whole of his mature work.²⁹ This can be seen clearly in Marx’s evolving reflections on value-based exchange after his first engagement with political economy that occurred in the 1840s. As the century progressed and Marx came to understand the importance of value as a social form – which we can see occurring in the 1857–1858 *Grundrisse* manuscripts – he immediately posited communal exchange as the fundamental antithesis of commodity exchange. From there, he began to see that some social form involving communal production, communal exchange, and communal consumption would be necessary to overcome the social form of value.

Let us see how this happens. Early in the *Grundrisse*, in the chapter on money, Marx lays out the social nature of value. He observes how, in contemporary society, exchange value expresses the social nexus; it embodies the mutual and general dependence of individuals who have nothing to do with each other except as private producers connected through the market.³⁰ Exchange value is a social nexus that confronts the individual as something alien and object-like (as money, you can carry it in your pocket, he says). Because of this object-like character, Marx concludes: “The social connection between persons is transformed into a social relation between things.”³¹ Yet Marx immediately perceives that the communal bond is the fundamental antithesis of this situation. There is an inverse relation, he observes, between community control and the rule of value: “The less social power the medium of exchange possesses...the

greater must be the power of the community.” Here Marx is juxtaposing two essentially contrary systems. On the one hand, there is the *capital system* of generalized commodity relations with its indirect sociality, via the exchange of money and commodities. On the other hand, there is the *communal system* in which a worker’s “productive activity and his share in production are bound to a specific form of labour and of product.”³² In these communal arrangements, there is directly social labor due to a preordained planning or control over work and distribution.

From here, Marx begins to develop the idea that social production in the future needs to be itself controlled like a common patrimony (“common wealth,” is the usual English translation). He thus projects a future postcapitalist situation in which people’s “social relations [become] their own communal [*gemeinschaftlich*, or community-based] relations...subordinated to their own communal control.”³³ He calls this future arrangement “communal production” and points out how it requires directly social – or “directly general” – labor.³⁴ Hence, what is being proposed is the organized exchange of *activities* rather than the indirect, post festum socialization that is achieved in commodity exchange. From these passages and their spare postulates regarding the future society, it will be a short step to Marx’s defense of the Russian peasant commune as a fulcrum for social regeneration.³⁵ It is worth noting that, in these very passages of the *Grundrisse* that contrast communal exchange with private exchange, Marx consistently maintains a perspective on the totality of capitalism. For just a few lines after laying out the basic juxtaposition Marx observes how commodity exchange and its division of labor leads to “agglomeration, combination, cooperation, the antithesis of private interests, class interests, competition, concentration of capital, monopoly, stock companies...world trade...dependence on the so-called world market, and [the] banking and credit system.”³⁶ It is implicit, then, that only ending private exchange and restoring some kind of communal coordination of labor activities will circumvent the concentration of capital and monopoly formation, which is the basis of imperialism.

Here we can see the way that private exchange of commodities is connected, very early in Marx, to the whole structure of capitalist society and therefore also to the posterior development of capitalism toward concentration of capital, expansion, financialization, and imperialism. As Marx says further on in the *Grundrisse*, “The later relations are to be regarded as developments coming out of this germ.”³⁷ By contrast, communal exchange of activities and communal bonds that subordinate production to collective control are proposed as a metabolic alternative to the alienated system that issues into monopoly and credit. (This is the very point that

Marx is making early in the *Grundrisse* by insisting that capitalism's contradictions cannot be solved by the kind of banking or monetary reform that Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and his followers proposed.) These latter emerge from the alienation of labor and of the labor process that accompanies the dynamics of generalized commodity exchange. Since Marx's vision in these passages goes from the micro-particular (communal control versus private commodity exchange) to the macro-whole that includes world trade, market expansion, and monopoly, it logically follows that Marx's positing of an alternative model of communal production – essentially based on communal control over productive activities – cannot be separated from his critique of the whole of the capitalist economy and society, up to and including its state and monopoly formations and the imperialist rivalry that plays out in the world market.

The Communal System in the Transition to Socialism

It is from Marx's theorization in the *Grundrisse* that Hungarian philosopher István Mészáros would base his arguments on the need for a *communal system* to overcome the *capital system*, developing theses which later served as an inspiration to Chávez's project of building communal socialism in Venezuela.³⁸ Mészáros's major work, *Beyond Capital*, focuses in chapter 19 on the law of value, which is at the center of the capital system. Following Marx, Mészáros contended that the law of value, which measures social wealth through abstract labor time, can only be overcome by another social configuration, an approach that involves the participation of all members of society in a planned organization of labor and allots disposable time in a rational way.³⁹ What is the social framework for overcoming the imposed rule of abstract labor time? Mészáros highlighted that Marx always insists that it is deliberate *communal* decision-making that overcomes the generic *social* law of value that is imposed behind producers' backs.⁴⁰ Hence the *communal system*, which Mészáros proposed as the radical alternative to the capital one.

Importantly, however, Mészáros's approach to the communal system – like the one he inspired in Chávez, as we will see below – was never myopic: it never lost sight of the bigger picture. For both proposed a communal project that, true to Marx's totalizing approach, would go from the *micro* to the *macro*, and involved an overall strategy that called for a political revolution (introducing a new command structure into the state) followed by the building of an alternative social metabolism based on the communes that would ultimately lead to a complete transformation of the whole society and abolishing all alienated political institutions. Since that project involved a comprehensive approach to the

totality of the capitalist system, it also recognized that the communes were part of a *strategy for the transition*, the implementation of any given mediating step of which would have to take into account not only the strategic horizon, but also the concrete realities of a particular situation, including global geopolitics and local correlations of forces. In this spirit, Mészáros insisted on the need for “historically specific...mediatory strategies” and accepted that “the full realization of this Marxian vision calls for the historically feasible articulation of the necessary material mediations in their global context.”⁴¹

Neither Mészáros nor Chávez demonstrated any particular interest in the late Marx and his comments on the rural commune, despite their affinities with that line of thought.⁴² Yet, it is a fact that after laying out the basic schema of communal production in the *Grundrisse* (referred to later as “production by freely associated people” in *Capital*) Marx would begin, in the last decade of his life, to investigate concrete examples of communal production in both historical and living rural communes, such as those of the Haudenosaunee people, as well as in Algerian, Russian, and Indian communes and communities. That is how we get to the late Marx, which precisely for this reason we refuse to separate from the rest of his *oeuvre*. It is worth pointing out that there is a very complete, multilevel continuity between the middle Marx and the late Marx’s approach to communes. For not only is it a relatively straightforward transition from Marx’s proposing communal control of social production in the *Grundrisse* to his posterior defense – coinciding with Nikolai Chernyshevsky – of the Russian commune as a fulcrum of social regeneration, but it is also true that the communal alternative he is proposing in both his middle and late accounts always remains connected to his larger critique of capitalist categories and the totality of the capitalist (later, imperialist) system.

Evidence of this second kind of continuity – the embedding of the communal alternative in the larger project – is to be found in the late Marx’s insistence that the Russian commune, if it is to be a fulcrum of social regeneration, needs to be accompanied by a political revolution that involves taking state power and overcoming the condition of dependency. Hence, as mentioned above, the late Marx was not defending the absolutely autonomous Russian commune in a state of perfection, but the commune as part of a revolution that is carried out by the organized working class, most likely in a political party, that has national and also international dimensions. This aspect of Marx’s approach to the Russian commune becomes particularly evident in the 1882 preface to the Russian translation of the *Communist Manifesto*, which points to the need for a “proletarian revolution,” if the communes are to survive and advance. It

is also relevant that Engels (with the approval of Marx) wrote a critique of Russian writer Pyotr Tkachev pointing out how the existing Russian state is not merely “hanging in the air,” as Tkachev contended, but is structurally connected to the ruling classes.⁴³

Marx’s geopolitically informed and fundamentally class-based approach to the Russian rural commune also resonates with his somewhat earlier approach to the Paris Commune of 1871. In his discussion of the Paris Commune, which Marx called “the political form at last discovered under which to work out the emancipation of labor [i.e., the working class],” he stressed that it emerged from a struggle against a foreign power and a capitulationist government.⁴⁴ Marx also emphasized the commune’s incompatibility with the existing configuration of the state (it was the “antithesis of Empire” referred to in my epigraph). Just like the Russian state, the French state was not “*hanging in the air*” but rather was the bourgeoisie’s “ultimate form of the State power.”⁴⁵ It was therefore an instrument of class rule that needed to be seized and radically repurposed by the workers.⁴⁶ This kind of continuity between Marx’s views in 1871 and 1881 is hardly surprising given the arguments for communal production that Marx had established in his mature work on political economy. That totalizing vision, which linked the productive model (communal or private) to the whole encompassing social formation, including national and international structures, is what led Marx to celebrate the Paris Commune having formed a “truly national government,” a key pillar of which was the “armed people” – in effect, a popular and sovereign army.⁴⁷ Clearly, the project’s explicitly political character, despite its vigorous internationalism, included the dimension of national liberation, which would have been a key reason for its coinciding with Marx’s vision of how to achieve emancipation through reliance on the communal form.⁴⁸

Venezuela: “The Isolated Commune Is Counterrevolutionary”

It is very common – in fact, one of the clearest expressions of Eurocentrism among intellectuals – to hastily declare processes of change in the Global South over and done with whenever they encounter the smallest setback. In the eyes of mainstream intellectuals, such processes are forever spiraling downward, as demonstrated by the chorus of expert voices always ready to declare the “end of a cycle” or the ebbing of the latest progressive tide.⁴⁹ Yet, more often than not, the now 25-year-old Venezuelan revolution has found ways to spiral *up* in a process of creative reinvention and implicit self-critique. In fact, nothing could better illustrate commune-building as a part of a comprehensive anti-imperialist and socialist strategy of the kind that Marx would endorse than the way the

Bolivarian Process has accumulated definitions: it became *anti-imperialist* in 2004, then incorporated *socialism* in 2006, then began using communes as the basic cells of its anti-imperialist socialist project in 2009–2010. Notably, at the very moment that Chávez proposed communes as the building blocks of socialism, he also warded off any idea of an autonomous communal project, by indicating that the isolated commune was “counterrevolutionary.” That was in *Aló Presidente Teórico No. 1* in 2009.⁵⁰ Further, in the next year, the government put into law the idea that communes should be connected through communal cities, federations, and, finally, the “communal state.”⁵¹ Clearly, then, just as Marx saw the communal form as part of a whole system that was the antithesis of the system based on commodity exchange that also included monopoly, global markets, and imperialism; so the Venezuelan commune was an organic component of an anti-imperialist and socialist revolutionary strategy. It was a continuation, a spiraling up, of a national anti-imperialist project, and therefore a continuation of the effort at national liberation that had been integral to the Bolivarian Process since its inception. Tellingly, when Chávez coined the slogan “*Commune or Nothing!*,” he was consciously echoing Simón Bolívar’s slogan “*Independence or Nothing!*” The implication was that building the commune was to be the guarantee of independence and sovereignty, while the *nothing* option that was being avoided included the prospect of imperialist domination.⁵²

The anti-imperialist character of the Venezuelan commune would receive ongoing corroboration in the years after Chávez died. This was true, in the first place, in an economic sense. For under the devastating effects of the U.S. sanctions and economic war against Venezuela that began in the 2010s, the commune became the site where social reproduction was assured for many Venezuelans, as viable processes of production and solidarious exchange were developed both inside and among communes to overcome the effects of the blockade-imposed scarcity. This is what Cira Pascual Marquina and I documented in our *Resistencia comunal* book series, which looks at the communes’ responses to the blockade.⁵³ Yet the Venezuelan commune was not only a grassroots *economic* stronghold, it was also a *political* one.⁵⁴ For it was in great measure from the communes that the socialist project was reaffirmed in Venezuela through a series of steps that involved building the Unión Comunera and other communal associations.⁵⁵

However, the most telling expression of the anti-imperialist potential of the Venezuelan commune occurred in the spring and summer of 2024, when the communes became the grassroots force that President Nicolás Maduro turned to under the grave imperialist assault that occurred in the context of the most recent presidential elections. At that point, when

oil minister Tarek Al Asami's once powerful pro-business current was in free fall, the communal project became once again the explicit mainstay of the government's national strategy. Properly understood, it was a strategy whose continuity had been made *politically possible* by the government's stubborn refusal to bend to imperialist demands and its creativity in surviving the blockade, while it was made *socially possible* because of the grassroots work developed by the communes. In this way, the potential of transformed state power to both foster and benefit from popular power – one of the most important lessons of the Bolivarian Revolution – was reaffirmed in the “commune-state alliance” that provided the key to resisting imperialism.⁵⁶ The centrality of the communes in the new revolutionary bloc would be strengthened and ratified by the implementation of quarterly communal consultation processes in early 2024, expanded financial support for the communes, and a projected 2025 constitutional reform giving them more powers.⁵⁷

Parallel Communal Projects in Bolivia and Brazil

Like the Venezuelan communal project, those promoted by the MST in Brazil and in the Bolivian process of change also coincide broadly with the Marxist communal strategy, having both socialist and anti-imperialist orientations. The Bolivian project of communitary socialism has roots reaching back well before Evo Morales Ayma assumed the presidency in 2006. His party, the Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS), was conceived of as a *political instrument* of social movements, and was based especially in Indigenous and campesino struggles, where there had been a longstanding defense of the Indigenous *ayllu* community as an organizational unit, sometimes in coordination with or as an alternative to the trade union model.⁵⁸ Morales himself had entered the political panorama as the leader of a *cocalero* (coca grower) movement, always under the eye of the politically driven U.S. “war on drugs.” This meant that his leadership gave a clear anti-imperialist cast to the project, just as he brought with him the crucial practice of always translating local economic and social issues into national and international ones.⁵⁹ On a theoretical level, it was Morales's vice president, Marxist theorist and former *guerrillero* Álvaro García Linera, who developed the most ambitious conceptualizations of communitary socialism.

The trajectory of García Linera's reflections about the commune and socialist construction reveals striking parallels with the evolution of the Venezuelan project. As part of the Túpac Katari Guerrilla Army (EGTK) in the 1980s and '90s, García Linera began to look closely at the commune form in Marx's late texts, such as the notes collected in the *Cuaderno Kovalévsky* that his clandestine organization published in 1989 (translated

from English by EGTK militant Raquel Gutiérrez).⁶⁰ As an engaged theorist, García Linera made the connection between Marx's claims about the Russian peasant commune and the Andean *ayllu* community in the Bolivian context. Avoiding the dogmatic idea amply embraced by the Bolivian left that the *ayllus* were simply backward feudal forms and therefore had to be dissolved, García Linera followed the late Marx in affirming that they could become a "revolutionary force" in the socialist movement.⁶¹ At first, García Linera's vision of the state was simply one of antagonism between the community and state.⁶² However, he quickly realized that the communities could not remain geographically separated singularities but would need to be coordinated in a strategic project that employed state power over the middle or even long term.

By 1997, García Linera was proposing that a transformed state apparatus could strengthen the potential of the communities.⁶³ In this way, the future vice president, responding to unfolding events with concrete analyses, came to locate his defense of the "socialist fulcrum" of community in a larger structure that included the geopolitical situation and a repurposed state apparatus. By the turn of the century, he had recognized the importance of incorporating various social sectors into the revolutionary "plebeian bloc," thereby transcending whatever remained of the narrowly autonomist communal vision he might have once had. Clearly, for the mature García Linera, the community that he defended was conceived not as something isolated – like the hypothetical "counterrevolutionary" commune that Chávez had warned against – but as part of a national project pursuing liberation from imperialism. Likewise, there was the realization, which has since been borne out, that a long period of transition would be required, which he referred to as "a bridge" in 2010.⁶⁴ From the perspective of the present, we can see how the Bolivian project, based on "communitary socialism" as a strategic orientation, has made important advances in a number of areas. These include women's and Indigenous rights, the historic achievement of a constitution that establishes Bolivia as a pluri-national state, and the nationalization of hydrocarbons, among many other advances. However, progress in realizing communitary socialism in a concrete sense has been impeded by the 2019 coup d'état and its lasting aftereffects, as well as the leadership's difficulties in projecting a program beyond the diverse mandates provided by its sometimes fragmented social base.

The project of the MST in Brazil is also one that points to a broad strategic horizon beyond the communal projects embodied in its land occupations. Although the movement began in the mid-1980s with the immediate goal of promoting land reform through direct seizure of unused and

underused terrain (followed by collective management in acampamentos and assentamentos) it has never separated itself from the political sphere.⁶⁵ In 1990, the movement, which is now a million strong, took the step of declaring itself socialist, and it has always defended national sovereignty in the face of imperialism (“Terra, Trabalho e Soberania Nacional” is one of the organization’s main slogans). Likewise, the MST has sought symbiotic relations with progressive parties (principally the Partido dos Trabalhadores but also the Partido Socialismo e Liberdade) and governments on the regional and national levels when they are in progressive hands. Moreover, MST has evolved over the four decades of its existence from focusing on a particular struggle – essentially the “agrarian question” – to challenging the totality of the capitalist-imperialist system. At the same time, it has come to understand that this requires organizing the whole Brazilian working class, both urban and rural (see our interview with João Pedro Stedile in this issue). An example of a strategic political project assumed by the MST in recent years was the long and costly struggle that it organized to free Luiz Inácio “Lula” da Silva from prison in Paraná state, thereby making possible his successful 2022 presidential campaign. That campaign was an intervention in national politics that went beyond any limited economicist or local objective, and it led to the defeat of the fascist candidate.

Comprehensive Anti-Imperialist Strategies

The three movements we have examined above all have a great deal in common, despite their different contexts and histories. Inter-movement dialogue is surely an important factor that has contributed to their parallel development and shared strategic objectives. Even so, one could still wonder at the striking combination of grassroots communal work with strategic anti-imperialism in these quite distinct Latin American projects. In fact, this combination represents a long tradition in Latin America. Almost a century ago, José Carlos Mariátegui, who is often taken to be the founder of Latin American Marxism, declared that *socialism* was the form that Latin American anti-imperialism would take. In a context marked by the overt imperialist intervention in Nicaragua of the late 1920s, Mariátegui wrote: “It is only possible to effectively oppose a capitalist, plutocratic, imperialist United States with a socialist Latin...America.”⁶⁶ Mariátegui thereby established a close link between anti-imperialism and socialist projects on the continent, whose communal character he also highlighted.⁶⁷ This is a link that has held up through the present. Indeed, as we have seen, the three projects examined above all exemplify the Peruvian Marxist’s claim by carrying out their communal-socialist constructions

within a strategic anti-imperialist horizon – a horizon that incorporates national liberation.

In the preceding, we have attempted to respond to the question: *When and where is a commune anti-imperialist?* Our response followed Marx's overall line of reasoning in establishing the conditions and context for an anti-imperialist commune. We first observed how the actually existing communes that Marx looked at and defended were most often in dependent or colonial situations, and he saw them as sites of resistance to colonialism. In the rural commune he investigated most thoroughly, the Russian one, Marx laid out the conditions – most centrally the need for a national revolutionary project – that were required if a commune was to become a cell of modern socialism. Next, we looked at how Marx's investigation of communes, even if it occurred most intensely in his last period (1870–1883), did not represent a major shift in his thought, but rather was continuous with the results of his mature work on political economy. We saw how, as early as the *Grundrisse* manuscript (1857–1858), Marx recognized that communal relations were the fundamental contrary of commodity-based exchange relations. He pointed to how they had existed before capitalism, but he also deduced that some form of restored communal production would be part of the future emancipated society.

This meant that communes could be used to build socialism and, where communes already existed, they could be incorporated into the socialist project. However, to do so, Marx realized, both at this time and later on, would require taking into account the whole of capitalism's development, including the state, banking, credit, and the world market. It would also require a comprehensive strategy that would include elements of geopolitics, such as opposition to capitalism's aggressive expansion in the world, which in our time has become imperialist expansion and extermination. Therefore, if communes are to be used as the cells of socialism in the way that Marx proposed, they will be part of an anti-imperialist strategy that does not ignore the need to intervene in and employ state power. In conclusion, we looked at how various Latin American projects are true to this vision, by combining communal construction with an anti-imperialist and socialist vision. However, to come full circle and reach outside of Latin America, it is also abundantly clear that, in sharp contrast to the settler-colonialist kibbutzim that are actually functional to imperialism, it is the entire united armed Palestinian resistance (including Hamas) with its heroic fight against imperialism and its insistence on national liberation, that is closer to the Marxist strategic ideal of the commune. This is what El Panal's communards sensed during Khaled's visit to their *barrio* – and they were right.

Notes

1. Kibbutzim in general, whatever the diverse motives of the individuals who participated in them might be, are part of a settler colonial project with inevitable military dimensions. It usually involves arming the inhabitants or using special "security" teams. Beginning in the 1980s, most kibbutzim abandoned their egalitarian dimension and socialist character to increasingly privatize through a process that was euphemistically called "reform" and led to the widespread implementation of salary relations. On the processes of privatization in kibbutzim, see Raymond Russell, Robert Hanneman, and Shlomo Getz, *The Renewal of the Kibbutz: From Reform to Transformation* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2013).

2. Andreina Chávez Alava, "The Day Leila Khaled Visited a Venezuelan Commune," *Venezuela Analysis*, January 6, 2025, venezuelanalysis.com. While Leila Khaled belongs to a different organization, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, she defends Hamas, considering both organizations to be integral parts of the broader Palestinian resistance movement.

3. Territorial autonomy was not so much the initial aim of the EZLN's project as it was an eventual outcome. When the EZLN launched its insurgency, it had the goal of intervening in national politics, even aspiring to take down the central government—though without seizing power itself. From the outset, the EZLN also succeeded in garnering widespread sympathy and support, both nationally and internationally, at one point seeking an alliance with the Partido de la Revolución Democrática. However, shifting circumstances and military-political setbacks compelled the organization to settle for establishing autonomous control over its territory, which has been its stance throughout the current century despite efforts such as La Otra Campaña of 2005. Fabiola Escárzaga, *La comunidad indígena insurgente: Perú, Bolivia, México (1980-2000)* (Coyoacán, México: UAM, 2017), 311-410. Leandro Vergaro-Camus, *Land and Freedom: The MST, the Zapatistas and Peasant Alternatives to Neoliberalism* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 257-84.

4. Among those emphasizing the novelty of the late Marx are Enrique Dussel, Haruki Wada, Kohei Saito, and (in a qualified way) Teodor Shanin. Saito even

uses the term "epistemological rupture" to refer to an alleged break occurring in Marx around 1867, contending that Marx became a "degrowth communist" afterward and even abandoned historical materialism. Kohei Saito, *Marx in the Anthropocene: Toward the Idea of Degrowth Communism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 208; Enrique Dussel, *El último Marx (1863-1882) y la liberación latinoamericana* (Mexico City: Siglo XXI, 1990); Haruki Wada, "Marx and Revolutionary Russia," and Teodor Shanin, "Late Marx: Gods and Craftsmen," both in *Late Marx and the Russian Road: Marx and the Peripheries of Capitalism*, ed. Teodor Shanin (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983). For an alternative vision, emphasizing continuity, see Derek Sayer and Philip Corrigan, "Late Marx: Continuity, Contradiction and Learning," which was included in *Late Marx and the Russian Road*. Marcello Musto also argues for continuity and questions the positions of Dussel, Wada, and Shanin in his *The Last Years of Karl Marx: An Intellectual Biography* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016).

5. See note 4.

6. Musto, *The Last Years of Karl Marx*, 23.

7. Musto, *The Last Years of Karl Marx*, 109, 21.

8. Musto, *The Last Years of Karl Marx*, 66.

9. Musto, *The Last Years of Karl Marx*, 23.

10. Shanin notes that Marx had more information about Russia, because "Russia was closer not only geographically [than China and India] but in the basic sense of human contact, possible knowledge of language and availability of evidence and analysis, self-generated by the natives." Shanin, *Late Marx and the Russian Road*, 19.

11. Presumably, the need to replace the dependent and distorted Tsarist state is part of what made Marx sympathize with the vanguard Narodnaya Volya group, who were attempting a revolutionary overthrow of tsarism. On Marx's sympathy with the populists of the Narodnaya Volya group, see Shanin, *Late Marx and the Russian Road*, 20-21.

12. This occurred offscreen in a program of *Escuela de Cuadros*, "Néstor Kohan: Marx frente al colonialismo,"

Escuela de Cuadros, YouTube video, 1:51:55, November 7, 2023.

13. Rosa Luxemburg, *Complete Works*, vol. 1, ed. Peter Hudis (London: Verso, 2013), 157.

14. Luxemburg, *Complete Works*, vol. 1, 155.

15. Luxemburg, *Complete Works*, vol. 1, 154.

16. Luxemburg, *Complete Works*, vol. 1, 249.

17. Luxemburg, *Complete Works*, vol. 1, 153.

18. Néstor Kohan, "Karl Marx y la dialéctica del Sur global," in *Marxismos y pensamiento crítico desde el Sur global*, eds. Néstor Kohan and Nayar López Castellanos (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Akal, 2023), 28-33.

19. Luxemburg, *Complete Works*, vol. 1, 163.

20. According to Marx, the incorporation of Western technology into the Russian commune was possible because it "exists in a modern historical context: it [the commune] is contemporaneous with a higher culture, and it is linked to a world market in which capitalist production is predominant." Shanin, *Late Marx and the Russian Road*, 102.

21. Marx thought the process of going from fragmented to collective labor would be facilitated by the Russian peasants' familiarity with the cooperative associations called *artels*. Shanin, *Late Marx and the Russian Road*, 121-22.

22. Shanin, *Late Marx and the Russian Road*, 103.

23. Shanin, *Late Marx and the Russian Road*, 115.

24. Shanin, *Late Marx and the Russian Road*, 115.

25. Marx's approach was distinct from that of Lewis Henry Morgan, who cut close to the "noble savage" ideal. Instead of the return to a past form of life, Marx saw socialism as a "higher form of society." See Musto, *The Last Years of Karl Marx*, 30.

26. Shanin, *Late Marx and the Russian Road*, 111. There is an implicit critique of patriarchy in Marx's comments on the *volost*, which he called "an assembly of bearded men."

27. Shanin, *Late Marx and the Russian Road*, 116.

28. See note 4.

29. A very early expression of Marx's defense of the commons can be found in his 1842 articles defending Rhineland peasants' rights to gather wood on common land in the *Rheinische Zeitung*. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works* (New York: International Publishers, 1975), vol. 1, 224–63.
30. In the *Grundrisse*, Marx did not yet distinguish between value and exchange value.
31. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy* (London: Penguin, 1973), 157.
32. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, 157.
33. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, 162.
34. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, 172.
35. This article does not address the celebrated *Formen* section of the *Grundrisse* dealing with precapitalist social formations, since there Marx is discussing communal forms that he sees as belonging essentially to the past, without considering how they could be nuclei of modern socialism.
36. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, 159. Marx's outline of his future work in the *Grundrisse*, which includes projected books on the state, international trade, and the world market, also points to his totalizing approach.
37. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, 310.
38. Chris Gilbert, *Commune or Nothing!: Venezuela's Communal Movement and Its Socialist Project* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2023), 85–102.
39. István Mészáros, *Beyond Capital: Toward a Theory of the Transition* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1995), section 19.5.1, 763–65.
40. Mészáros, *Beyond Capital*, 19.1.1, 764.
41. Mészáros, *Beyond Capital*, 19.3.1, 753; section 19.5.3, 769.
42. There is a brief discussion of the Vera Zasulich correspondence in Mészáros's *Beyond Capital*, section 13.6, 487–88.
43. Frederick Engels, "On Social Relations in Russia" (1875), in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Works*, vol. 2 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977), 388.
44. Marx, "The Civil War in France" (Third Address), in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Writings on the Paris Commune*, ed. Hal Draper (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 76.
45. Marx, "The Civil War in France," 72.
46. Of course, the state will ultimately need to be abolished, but this requires an extended process, during which time a transformed state power will have to exist.
47. Marx, "The Civil War in France," 80.
48. The class-based character of the Paris Commune is expressed in Engels's claim that it was the model of the dictatorship of the *proletariat* in his 1891 introduction to Marx's *The Civil War in France*. Note that Marx defended the commune but did so critically, pointing out, like V. I. Lenin after him, that it did not act decisively enough, was not sufficiently centralist, was not *enough* of a national government, and presumably did not have *enough* of a strategic vision. Engels, Introduction in Marx and Engels, *Writings on the Paris Commune*, 34.
49. The deluge of articles and symposia proclaiming the "end of the progressive cycle" or the retreat of the Pink Tide—a veritable festival of schadenfreude—that occurred in the mid-2010s epitomized this Eurocentric perspective. It was a favorite theme of the Latin American Studies Association and its congresses.
50. Hugo Chávez Frías, *Aló Presidente Teórico*, No. 1, September 6, 2009, transcript at todochavez.gob.ve.
51. Ley Orgánica del Poder Popular, *Gaceta Oficial de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela*, December 21, 2010.
52. Gilbert, *Commune or Nothing!*, 27–39.
53. Chris Gilbert and Cira Pascual Marquina, *Resistencia Comunal* book series (Caracas: Observatorio Venezolano Antitibloqueo, 2021–2025).
54. Cira Pascual Marquina and Chris Gilbert, *Venezuela, The Present as Struggle: Voices from the Bolivarian Revolution* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2020).
55. Gilbert, *Commune or Nothing!*, 126–39.
56. The longstanding approach of the Bolivarian Revolution—which emphasizes building people's power through a two-way, dialectical relationship with the state—contrasts with the more strictly autonomist principles of neo-Zapatismo.
57. Beginning in May 2024, there have been quarterly communal consultation processes. These involve organizing elections in communes to determine the use of state-supplied funds for projects that commune members have debated in previously organized assemblies. In late 2024, the government committed to supplying 600 million USD to some five thousand communes and communal circuits in the country (a "communal circuit" is essentially a commune-in-formation). The consultation process has been important because, for existing communes, it increases participation and ratifies the commune in the eyes of its constituency. For communes that are still in a process of formation, the consultations serve as a strong incentive to those in the communities to carry forward the process of consolidating the commune.
58. The aim of being a political instrument of social movements is captured in the MAS party's full name: Movimiento al Socialismo—Instrumento Político por la Soberanía de los Pueblos (Movement for Socialism—Political Instrument for the Sovereignty of the Peoples). The 1970s saw a surge in Bolivia's Indigenous movements, in which the memory of Túpak Katari, an Aymara revolutionary of the late eighteenth century, figured prominently. Founded in 1986, Felipe Quispe Huanca's Ayllus Rojos movement promoted Indigenous forms of organization and also self-determination in the communities. Another important milestone occurred in 1988 when the by then highly *Katarista*-influenced campesino organization Confederación Sindical Única de Trabajadores Campesinos stepped up to defend "communal power." Fabiola Escárzaga, *La comunidad indígena insurgente*, 217–18, 230–32.
59. Soledad Valdivia Rivera, *Political Networks and Social Movements: Bolivian State-Society Relations under Evo Morales 2006–2016* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2019), 138, 145.
60. Karl Marx, *El Cuaderno Kovalevsky*, trans. Raquel Gutiérrez (La Paz: Ofensiva Roja, 1989); Karl Marx, "Excerpts from M. M. Kovalevsky," in Lawrence Krader, *The Asiatic Mode of Production* (Assen, Netherlands: Van Gorcum, 1971), 343–412.
61. Álvaro García Linera, "Introducción al Cuaderno Kovalevsky" (1989) in Karl Marx, *Comunidad, nacionalismos y capital: Textos inéditos* (La Paz: Vicepresidencia del Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia, 2018), 22, 37–38.
62. J. Fabian Cabaluz and Tomás Torres López, *Aproximaciones al marxismo latinoamericano: teoría, historia, y política*

(Santiago de Chile: Ariadna ediciones, 2021), 93. Cabaluz and Torres show that García Linera never fully coincided with the autonomist approach of Gutiérrez and the Bolivian Comuna group of intellectuals, moving further from their positions as the twenty-first century progressed.

63. Álvaro García Linera, *Forma Valor y Forma Comunidad: Aproximación teórica-abstracta a los fundamentos civilizatorios que preceden al Ayllu Universal* (La Paz: CLASCO/Muela del Diablo Editores, 2009 [1997]), 203-29. For more on this transformed vision of the state, see García Linera's Sorbonne conference on

Nicos Poulantzas: "Estado, Democracia y Socialismo," in Álvaro García Linera, *Socialismo Comunitario: Un horizonte de época* (La Paz: Vicepresidencia del Estado, 2015), 34-66.

64. Álvaro García Linera, "Socialismo Comunitario: Un aporte de Bolivia al mundo," *Revista Análisis* 3, no. 5 (February 7, 2010): 7.

65. In the process of occupying land, MST first establishes an *acampamento* (encampment) where landless peasants prepare, plan, and often hold a portion of the land that they aim to obtain. Once the state recognizes their possession of

the land, it becomes a permanent *asentamiento* (settlement).

66. Eds. Harry E. Vanden and Marc Becker, *José Carlos Mariátegui: An Anthology* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2011), 129.

67. Mariátegui believed that "practical socialism" existed in the Andean *ayllu* communities and argued that it should be a basis for constructing socialism in that context. José Carlos Mariátegui, *Siete ensayos de interpretación sobre la realidad Peruana* (Caracas: Biblioteca Ayacucho, 1979). See especially the chapter entitled "El problema de la tierra."



The [ayllu] communities rest on the foundation of the common ownership of the lands where they live and cultivate, maintained through pacts and bonds of consanguinity that unite the various families forming the ayllu. The arable and pasture lands belonging to the community form the patrimony of said collectivity.... But the collectivist spirit of the Indigenous people is revealed not only in the existence of communities. The age-old custom of the "Minka" [traditional communal labor system] persists in the territories of Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador, and Chile; work that a smallholder, even if not a community member, cannot perform due to lack of helpers, illness, or another similar reason, is accomplished thanks to the cooperation and assistance of neighboring smallholders, who in turn receive a share of the harvest product when its quantity allows, or other manual assistance at a later time.... These and other forms of extra-communal cooperation...attest to the vitality of primitive Inca collectivism, capable tomorrow of multiplying its forces, applied to industrialized latifundios and with the necessary means of cultivation. The VI Congress of the Communist International has once more pointed out the possibility, for peoples with rudimentary economies, of initiating a collective economic organization directly, without undergoing the long evolution passed through by other peoples. We believe that...none like the Incan indigenous population possesses such favorable conditions for primitive agrarian communism – subsisting in concrete structures and a profound collectivist spirit – to transform, under the hegemony of the proletarian class, into one of the most solid foundations of the collectivist society advocated by Marxist communism.

— JOSÉ CARLOS MARIÁTEGUI AND HUGO PESCE,
Presentation at the First Latin American Communist Conference,
Buenos Aires, 1929.