
From Neoliberal Dystopia to Communist Utopia: An Evaluation of Alain Badiou's "Communist Hypothesis"

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Résumé

The purpose of this paper is to evaluate French philosopher Alain Badiou's "communist hypothesis." According to Badiou's hypothesis, the domination of capital over labor is not permanent or 'inevitable.' The working class could establish itself as the ruling class under ripe political conditions. The hypothesis outlines an egalitarian arrangement in which dominant capitalist social relations of production and forces of production would cease to exist. Badiou's hypothesis consists of four principles: (1) the socialization of means of production and distribution; (2) ending of the division between manual and intellectual labor that Badiou refers to as the "polymorphous worker;" (3) the dissolution of identity politics; and finally, (4) the "gradual withering away" of the state toward "direct self-management of society."

The communist hypothesis is not merely a set of abstract propositions that are debated within the corridors of Ivory Tower philosophy and political science departments. For Badiou, the movement toward communism consists of political struggles that push the boundaries beyond the limits of the existing capitalist economic structures. History offers many examples of this from the French Revolution to slave rebellions against the Roman Empire led by such figures as Spartacus.

Political struggles, such as the Occupy Wall Street and the Yellow Vests movements, arise in response to deteriorating economic conditions, sometimes emerging organically from local concerns. Land disputes in rural Spain, for instance, gave rise to a new social experiment in Marinaleda, a town of 2500 people. This Southern Spanish town's mayor, Sanchez Gordillo, declared the city a communist utopia. The town has no police force because it believes that community self-policing is more effective in crime prevention. It offers parents affordable childcare and access to a public swimming pool. It also organizes literacy classes for older adults and provides free wireless Internet for its townspeople.

Though historians and political scientists have relegated to the footnotes of history communism's failed experiments, a growing number of Russians and Eastern Europeans are yearning for a return to a system that better provides for its citizens-as communism had done previously. A recent survey of 1600 Russians from 139 localities found that 66 percent of Russians longed for the Soviet Union. Inflation, wage decline, and a recent rise in the retirement age were among the reasons participants in the survey gave for this nostalgia.

In summary, this paper proposes that Badiou's communist hypothesis offers an alternative vision to the dominant neoliberal paradigm that asserts the supremacy of the free-market capitalism's benefits for a country's people.

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