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Today

GARY W. LLOYD, Editor

"Our country is the world – our countrymen are mankind."

L.D. BLISS, Printer

# Walking Away from Communism

## as the first step away from traditional Capitalism

from Martin Luther King, Jr.  
*Stride Toward Freedom* (1958)

"In short, I read [Karl] Marx as I read all the influential historical thinkers--from a dialectical point of view, combining a partial yes and partial no. Insofar as Marx posited a metaphysical materialism, an ethical relativism, and a strangulating totalitarianism, I responded with an unambiguous 'no'; but insofar as he pointed to weaknesses of traditional capitalism, contributed to the growth of a definite self-consciousness in the masses, and challenged the social conscience of the Christian churches, I responded with a definite 'yes.'"

Every heated discussion that I have had with a free market fundamentalist always seems to find its way to the same little rhetorical flourish. "Well [Mr. Editor]," they ask me, "What alternative to the market do you suggest?" I resent the hint of disdain in their voice, particularly because it does indeed touch on my inadequacies. I wish I was more intellectually adept when talking about economics. Nonetheless, what I resent more is the assumption that there is only one alternative to traditional capitalism--namely socialist communism--which is no alternative at all. It's apparently either Adam Smith or Josef Stalin. Choose one.

The Occupy Wall Street encampments of 2011 were, in my opinion, a partial fulfillment of King's dream of the Poor People's Campaign that he had hoped to pull off in the summer of 1968, a dream deferred by his assassination in April of '68. Certainly, a revision of capitalism figured greatly in King's thinking in his final year of life. "The trouble," he told Andy Young, "is that we live in a failed system. Capitalism does not permit an even flow of economic resource-

es. With this system, a small privileged few are rich beyond conscience and almost all others are doomed to be poor at some level. . . . [W]hat troubles me now is that for all the steps we've taken toward integration, I've come to believe that we are integrating into a burning house."

"Well, Dr. King, what alternative to capitalism do you suggest?" King was walking away from capitalism, but how could he do so without justifying his opponents' obsessive vision of him as an anti-patriotic communist?

*The Liberator Today*, in the weeks and months ahead, intends to walk away from capitalism in its present destructive form, and here is the strategy that we are going to employ: we are going to begin by complying with the free market fundamentalist's exhortation. We are going to initially posit only two alternatives and then resolutely turn our back on Marxist socialism and begin walking away from it.



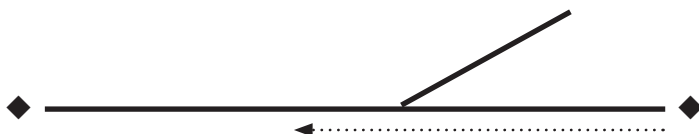
So our repudiation of communism is evident, as was King's (as we'll see shortly.) The myth that MLK was a communist is less a myth perpetuated by J. Edgar Hoover than a myth perpetuated *about* Hoover himself. In a [movie review](#) of Clint Eastwood/Leonardo diCaprio's film *J. Edgar*, Atlantic magazine writes:

Despite the rift between Hoover and King, Hoover remained a real FBI man—he was no Joe McCarthy, whom the movie character Hoover insults as an "opportunist." Still, most people who see *J. Edgar* would never know that when segregationist governors such as Ross Barnett (Mississippi) and George Wallace (Alabama) campaigned against civil rights legislation by smearing Martin Luther King for supposedly being part of a "communist training school" in Tennessee and claiming that King "belonged to more communist organizations than any man in the U.S.," it was Hoover's bureau that produced information refuting such lies.

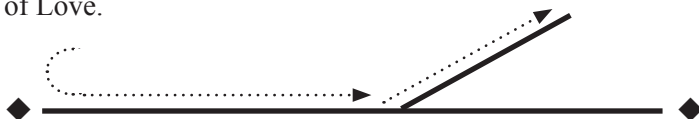
This repudiation of communism will serve us in our journey in another valuable way. We will walk away from communism for a set of reasons which should be rational and moral justifiable, but then if we have any integrity, we will use those same reasons to determine just how far we walk back toward capitalism. For instance, King rejected Marxism for three main reasons: “a metaphysical materialism, an ethical relativism, and a strangulating totalitarianism.” Having rejected these things in communism, why should he accept them any more when capitalism exhibits its own version of these same things? According to our diagram, in walking away from communism, nothing demands that we walk all the way back to capitalism.



What is more likely is that we will discover a fork in the road, but a fork that is only visible when walking from one direction. This is a phenomenon that has happened to me more than once when hiking in a heavily forested area. My line of sight is forward, but when a side trail diverts at a backwards angle, and if a thick bush or my own tunnel vision prevents me from seeing it, I have often walked right on past it, forcing myself to backtrack later. This is likely the mistake of the free market fundamentalist. Refusing to move a step from what he perceives to be the summit, he only possesses a direct line of sight down one trail. At the other end, he sees communism and concludes that it is the only other alternative. He dare not move down the trail an inch, and can not see nor imagine another way.



And so with this edition of *The Liberator Today*, we begin a sporadic series, a journey away from capitalism in search of a fork in the road which, almost assuredly will be, as most diversions away from -isms are, a fork known by the name of Love.



Martin Luther King’s 1958 book *Stride Toward Freedom* contains a chapter entitled “Pilgrimage to Nonviolence.” It was later re-published in *Christian Century* magazine as part of its series, “How My Mind Has Changed.” This is the terminology not only of repudiation but also of discovering and following forks in the road. King writes of Marxism:

“During the Christmas holidays of 1949 I decided to spend my spare time reading Karl Marx to try to understand the appeal of communism for many people. For the first time I carefully scrutinized *Das Kapital* and *The Communist Manifesto*. I also read some interpretive works on the thinking of Marx and Lenin. In reading such Communist writings I drew certain conclusions that have remained with me to this day.

“**First** I rejected their materialistic interpretation of history. Communism, avowedly secularistic and materialistic, has no place for God. This I could never accept, for as a Christian I believe that there is a creative personal power in this universe who is the ground and essence of all reality--a power that cannot be explained in materialistic terms. History is ultimately guided by spirit, not matter.

“**Second**, I strongly disagreed with communism’s ethical relativism. Since for the Communist there is no divine government, no absolute moral order, there are no fixed, immutable principles; consequently almost anything--force, violence, murder, lying--is a justifiable means to the “millennial” end. This type of relativism was abhorrent to me. Constructive ends can never give absolute moral justification to destructive means, because in the final analysis the end is preexistent in the mean.

“**Third**, I opposed communism’s political totalitarianism. In communism the individual ends up in subjection to the state. True, the Marxist would argue that the state is an “interim” reality which is to be eliminated when the classless society emerges; but the state is the end while it lasts, and man only a means to that end. And if any man’s so-called rights or liberties stand in the way of that end, they are simply swept aside. His liberties of expression, his freedom to vote, his freedom to listen to what news he likes or to choose his books are all restricted. Man becomes hardly more, in communism, than a depersonalized cog in the turning wheel of the state.

“This deprecation of individual freedom was objectionable to me. I am convinced now, as I was then, that man is an end because he is a child of God. Man is not made for the state; the state is made for man. To deprive man of freedom is to relegate him to the status of a thing, rather than elevate him to the status of a person. Man must never be treated as a means to the end of the state, but always as an end within himself.”

-A.O.B.

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