



KEY WORDS

COMMUNIST VS. LEFTIST AND

POSTMODERNIST CONCEPTIONS

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Today, when people in North America join protests against injustice, try to understand what's behind all the oppression in the world, and look for strategies to end it, they soon encounter Leftist and postmodernist politics, especially on social media, and are quickly inculcated in Leftist and postmodernist world outlooks.¹ Since Leftist and postmodernist politics and world outlooks are *impediments* to the development of revolutionary politics and prevent people from acting towards the revolutionary transformation of society, *kites* has been consistently polemicizing against them. Even with these polemics, many *kites* readers still have trouble distinguishing between genuine communism, on the one hand, and the paltry visions of the Left and postmodernism, on the other—a consequence of the lack of socialist states since the 1976 counter-revolutionary coup in China and the lack of communist vanguard parties in the US and Canada today.

This impasse is in part a consequence of Leftists using communist terminology but with a whole different conception of that terminology that is diametrically opposed to revolution. So we thought it might be helpful to contrast communist conceptions of some “key words” with those of Leftists and postmodernists. We hope this “compare and contrast” exercise can spark some debate and help would-be revolutionaries distinguish between the communist world outlook from ways of viewing the world that pose as radical but in fact can never serve the revolutionary transformation of society.

Trigger

Communist: A mechanism that communists pull to annihilate the enemies of the revolution.

Postmodernist: A word postmodernists have appropriated from therapy (where it serves a productive purpose) and used to justify prioritizing their real and/or performative personal/emotional

¹ For an explanation of what it meant by Leftist and postmodernist outlooks, see “Kick ‘Em While They’re Down” in *kites* #3 (2021).

reactions to injustices over and against the struggles to end those injustices.

Capitalism

Communist: A system driven by the incessant accumulation of capital through the private appropriation of all that is produced via human labor, technology, and the earth's natural resources. Though capitalism creates conditions of socialized production on a global scale, exploitation is its lifeblood, the profit motive compels the system toward an anarchy of production rather than rational social planning to meet human needs, and capitalism commodifies everything, including human labor and social relations.

Leftist: An economic system where the bosses exploit the workers.

Postmodernist: An ideal place to advance their position in the economic and social relations of commodity exchange.

The Bourgeoisie

Communist: The class that owns and/or monopolizes control over the means of production and is driven, by the "expand or die" logic of capital accumulation, to accumulate ever greater profits.

Leftist: The bosses; the rich.

Postmodernist: People to look up to if they're from a shared identity group or the "right" identity group; people to oppose if they're from the wrong identity group; people to get funding from for nonprofit activist organizations.

Colonialism

Communist: Under monopoly capitalism (when blocs of capital were concentrated as monopolies roughly at the end of the nineteenth century and continuing down to today) and stretching from the nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century, a system of foreign domination wherein an oppressor country exercises territorial control over an oppressed country so that they can pillage its resources and exploit its people. Prior and other systems of

colonialism involved the movement of large numbers of European settlers into the colonies (settler-colonialism), the expulsion of the Indigenous people from their land and the genocide of those Indigenous people, resource extraction through exploitative trade relations and exploiting the Indigenous people in mines and other extractive enterprises, and the kidnapping of millions of Africans to work as slaves on plantations in the colonies. Since the dawn of capitalism in Europe, pre-existing colonial empires were drawn into the process of capitalist accumulation on a world-scale, leading to a dramatic increase in the intensity of exploitation of the land and labor of the colonized. As formal colonialism ended in most of the world in the decades following World War II, imperialist domination of the oppressed countries continued in new forms, wherein formally independent countries remained under the economic domination of foreign powers, a system often referred to as neocolonialism.

Leftist: A fancier word for racism.

Postmodernist: A system that justifies decolonization workshops, seminars, and trainings, none of which alter the material relations of exploitation and oppression under capitalism-imperialism.

Settlers

Communist: (1) As capitalism dawned in Europe, in order to meet the continual need for capital accumulation and, secondarily, to release the pressure of growing surplus populations, numbers of Europeans were encouraged or enticed to colonize overseas territories and participate in inflicting brutalities on Indigenous populations, from forced slave labor in mines to outright genocide, coupled with the ultimate prize: appropriating the land and its resources. This definition of settlers does not include those who came from overseas and were mainly exploited by the settler bourgeoisie, were not enlisted in frontier expansion and its murderous campaigns, and were pressed into manual labor and later industrial production, e.g., a Jewish Eastern European immigrant working in a factory and living in the Lower East Side of Manhattan around 1900 is not a

“settler.” (2) Israelis (obviously not including Palestinians who were stuck in Israeli territory after 1948 or their descendants, who have Israeli citizenship) and tech, finance, and crypto-currency bros moving to Puerto Rico.

Leftist/Postmodernist: (1) Evil Europeans who took over Indigenous people’s lands and did horrible things to them (this definition comprehends outer appearances but fails to make a materialist analysis of the class interests and productions relations that created and propped up settlers). (2) A synonym for white people and sometimes also non-Indigenous immigrants (this seems to be the more frequent meaning behind Leftist and postmodernist use of the word “settlers,” and only further muddies the analytical waters). (3) What petty-bourgeois white people and the kids of petty-bourgeois immigrants who went to university in the US or Canada call working-class white people and working-class immigrants to deflect their own sense of or actual guilt for being a lower-level functionary in the capitalist-imperialist system (this definition betrays the *petty-bourgeois class outlook* at work behind the Leftist and postmodernist conception of settlers, and, ironically, has a lot in common with the settler mentality).

Proletariat

Communist: The class of people who are deprived and dispossessed of any ownership of the means of production, who work, when they can find work, in conditions of socialized production on a global scale in which their labor is exploited, and who are cast aside as surplus populations when the bourgeoisie cannot profitably exploit their labor.

Leftist: The workers.

Postmodernist:

Communism

Communist: A state of existence beyond commodity production and exchange in which humanity has done away with all exploitation, property relations, and oppressive social divisions and lives according to the principle of “from each according to their ability, to each according to their need.”

Leftist: ???

Postmodernist: The most terrifying society imaginable.

Socialism

Communist: A transition period beginning after the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism-imperialism driven by continuous class struggle and radical social transformation until the achievement of communism.

Leftist: A society in which commodity relations and the laws of capital accumulation are still the defining features, but with some social reforms and better material provisions for the masses.

Postmodernist: “Just another white man’s ideology.”

The Dictatorship of the Proletariat

Communist: The form of state during the socialist transition period in which the proletariat, led by its vanguard party, monopolizes political power through control over the key institutions of society, exercising dictatorship over the overthrown bourgeoisie and preventing the generation of a new bourgeoisie while working to live with and transform the petty-bourgeoisie. The best example of the dictatorship of the proletariat was in China from 1949–76.

Leftist: (1) Oh the horror! (2) Bourgeois-democracy for the proletariat. (3) Stanning for past and distant post-revolution governments that the person doing the stanning wouldn’t last a day living under.

Postmodernist: Oh the horror!

Revolution (in the present day)

Communist: The violent overthrow of the existing order by the revolutionary army of the proletariat, in which the institutions, especially the repressive apparatuses, of the bourgeois state are destroyed and the bourgeoisie's wealth and capital is forcibly expropriated.

Leftist: Bigger protests with the "right" slogans? The expansion of "mutual aid" activist networks? Some vague idea about "councils" overwhelming the ruling class?

Postmodernist: That tipping point where enough people have "checked their privilege," "done the work," and/or become good "allies" or "accomplices" (basically, an amalgamation of individual processes of moral change rather than a transformation of the material relations of society).

The Vanguard Party

Communist: An organization capable of leading the revolutionary overthrow of the bourgeoisie and leading the socialist transition to communism, made up of the most advanced elements from the proletariat and popular classes who have remolded themselves as communists and dedicated themselves to the revolution, which functions according to the principles of democratic centralism and is organized so wisely and so well that the bourgeois repressive state apparatus does not know its organizational structure and cannot easily destroy it.

Leftist: An organization of dumb Leftists led by slightly smarter opportunists that splits or implodes rather frequently, puts all its internal documents on a google drive, and has zero sense of how to protect their organization from repression because they don't really intend to do anything that will be met with serious repression.

Postmodernist: The most oppressive entity imaginable.

Leadership

Communist: Within the organizational structure of democratic centralism, the ongoing process of working out strategy and tactics for revolution in the concrete conditions we find ourselves in and training and guiding cadre and the masses to implement that strategy and the tactics that flow from it. As Mao summarized, communist leadership is a matter of working out ideas and using cadre well.

Leftist: Posting dumb clichéd Leftist shit on social media and getting lots of likes.

Postmodernist: Same as above plus getting appointed (by the virtue of wealthy donors) to some executive position in an activist non-profit organization.

The United Front Under the Leadership of the Proletariat

Communist: An alliance of classes under the leadership of the revolutionary proletariat and its vanguard party forged in order to isolate the bourgeoisie and amass the strength to overthrow it, as well as to build a new socialist society after the revolution.

Leftist: Getting a bunch of shitty Leftist organizations to sign on to a statement or put on a protest together.

Revolutionary Defeatism

Communist: Morally and strategically welcoming the defeats suffered by one's "own" bourgeoisie.

Leftist: Staning for all kinds of bourgeois and reactionary governments and forces all around the world because they happen to be in conflict with US imperialism (because Leftists are incapable of seeing more than one contradiction in play or sorting out contradictions with any nuance).

The Mass Line

Communist: A method of leadership wherein communists take the scattered, unsystematic ideas of the masses and concentrate them

into political programs that can mobilize the masses in class struggle.

Leftist: At best, talking to the masses about their most immediate needs and narrow interests and then doing charity to try to meet those needs and serve those narrow interests.

Mass Work

Communist: Going out broadly among the masses and conducting social investigation and carrying out political agitation in order to organize them in class struggle.

Leftist: Doing some charity among the masses, treating the masses as narrow identity categories, and maybe involving some masses in an auxiliary way around some very narrowly conceived struggle over narrow interests.

Mutual Aid

Communist: Organizing the masses to find collective solutions to their common problems so that they can take part in the revolutionary movement.

Leftist/postmodernist: Charity.

Identity

Communist: The ways that people understand themselves in relation to their social background, their kinship and ancestry, their place within the prevailing social relations of society, their lifestyle, and their cultural preferences.

Leftist/postmodernist: A rigid and monolithic category that individuals are ascribed to; something to use as capital in the oppression Olympics.

The Masses

Communist: The oppressed and exploited people in society who can be mobilized to overthrow capitalism-imperialism and begin the socialist transition to communism; the people we love and serve.

Leftist: An identity category.

Mass Organization

Communist: An organization of (a section of) the masses, bound together by common class experience and struggle, ideally led by the communist vanguard party.

Leftist: An organization of Leftists with a lower bar for membership and a lower level of political unity than whatever the fuck Leftists think a vanguard party is.

Social Media

Communist: The Silicon-Valley bourgeoisie's way of profiting from and reproducing, among all age groups and strata of society, the social relations and popularity contests characteristic of everyday life at a suburban middle school. A powerful nexus of cold capitalist economics and highly effective, participatory ideological state apparatuses inculcating people in idiocy and individualism.

Leftist: My favorite place.

Postmodernist: My favorite place.

Theory

Communist: The development of concepts to guide the revolutionary transformation of society by way of the scientific study of history and contemporary reality, engagement with the intellectual life of society as a whole, and practical involvement in and summation of the class struggle.

Leftist: Reading lots of books and learning the right phraseology so you can brag that you're more correct than other Leftists, but never gaining the ability to apply those phrases and books to the real world.

Postmodernist: The invention of ever more esoteric jargon, the more unintelligible the better, in order to make yourself sound smart, innovative, and more woke than everyone else.