

THE FUTURE OF REVOLUTION



**COMMUNIST PROSPECTS FROM
THE PARIS COMMUNE TO
THE GEORGE FLOYD UPRISING**

JASPER BERNES



The Future of Revolution: Communist Prospects from the Paris Commune to the George Floyd Uprising

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Review by Megan Bryer

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Jasper Bernes's *The Future of Revolution* is not an easy book to pick up for a reader less familiar with the history of communist thought. It can feel dense, but it reengages communist ideas with a sense of possibility. Rather than offering a new idea, Bernes re-examines old and sometimes forgotten revolutionary texts to ask how they might illuminate the future. His contribution thus echoes Marx's remark that "revolutions dress themselves up in the costumes of the past in order to speak the poetry of the future".

The book traces the history of workers' councils and revolutionary forms from the Paris Commune to May '68. Each, Bernes argues, adds a new layer to communism's "test." The commune revealed to Marx that revolutions cannot merely "seize the state machinery and wield it for its own purposes". They must dismantle it, and workers must be armed.

The workers' councils sharpened our understanding of the criteria for the emergence of communism, demonstrating the need for mass self-organisation. Both commune and council, Bernes emphasises, show us that communism is not simply the abolition of capitalism or value, but the creation of a classless, stateless, moneyless society built on transparent, participatory processes.

Bernes draws on Marx, Rosa Luxemburg, C. L. R. James, and council-communist traditions to argue for a reimagined revolutionary practice aligned with 21st century conditions. He sets out criteria for any revolutionary movement: it must break the armed power of the state, be proletarian and mass-based, establish common provisioning without markets or law, transcend divisions of labour and geography, and operate through comprehensible, participatory structures of delegation. These



criteria form what he calls the “test of communism,” a way to measure whether a movement is truly revolutionary.

This framework is sobering in a moment when the workers’ movement and its institutions are diminished compared to the last century. Bernes observes that trade unions and parliamentary parties once sufficed to secure gains within capitalism but cannot overcome it. Today, new forms of organisation are needed, often arising outside the workplace, in spaces shaped by precarity, policing, and social fragmentation, and in most instances without any revolutionary vision.

Bernes reflects on the George Floyd uprising as a moment that, while not revolutionary in itself, contained revolutionary potential. Such movements, he argues, could become revolutionary if they broaden their reach to non-militants and non-activists, extending from the streets into schools, prisons, and workplaces, creating open points of entry for participation, and sustaining spaces of reflection and coordination. Here, Bernes shifts the focus from asking whether a movement is revolutionary to asking what it would take for it to become so.

Not all frontiers of social transformation are addressed. Artificial intelligence and its implications for class, for example, go untouched. But Bernes’s central concern of how revolutionary movements can meet the test of communism offers a framework to judge their potential and to move beyond old vehicles for struggle.

The Future of Revolution revives communist thought and makes the provocation that revolution remains an open possibility, but only if we are willing to rethink its forms. For those interested in the future of collective emancipation it is worth a read.