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Communes & Cooperatives

RECLAIMING COMMUNES PT. 6/6

Image: *Phil Wriggles.*



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Communes are sub-national political forms in which the working class democratically plans production according to social and ecological needs.

Through the collective practice of reproducing their own lives, commune members develop a new consciousness, becoming “social individuals.”

Source: John Bellamy Foster, Monthly Review (2025).

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Communes in the Global North?

All states in the Global North are run by and for the capitalist ruling class. This limits the possibilities of placing the means of (re)production in community hands – the basis of the commune form.

While they do not approach the complexity of collective governance demonstrated by communes, the cooperative movement stands out as one area in which ownership is being transferred directly into the hands of the working class.

We can look to Mondragon, the largest co-op in the world, to understand the potential of this strategy →

__Sources:__ Sam Gindin, Jacobin (2016); Upstream, Worker Cooperatives Pt. 2 (2018). __Image:__ Workers.Coop.

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Mondragon

Founded in the Basque Country in 1956, Mondragon today has a workforce of 80,000 people and operates through 150,000 companies.

It has delivered important gains for its workers, including:

- **Flattening the pay ratio** between top and bottom income earners
- One or two **general assemblies** every year, **where members make planning decisions**
- **Election of each co-op's general council** (i.e. managers) by members



However, Mondragon also reveals the key limitations of cooperatives.

*Sources: Sam Gindin, Jacobin (2016); Upstream, Worker Cooperatives Pt. 2 (2018). **Image:** Mondragon.*



As Mondragon has grown, the pressures of competing within a capitalist system have corrupted the co-op's egalitarian principles. For example, Mondragon has increasingly made use of non-member hired labour. For many, it has become just another employer.

Analysing cooperatives, Marx wrote how they "naturally reproduce, and must reproduce, everywhere in their actual organization all the shortcomings of the prevailing system."

Consequently, co-op members are not being transformed into social individuals collectively building a new world. Many members' main interest is getting a better wage or cheaper goods and services, not building socialism.

Sources: *Marx, Capital Volume 3 (1974); Sam Gindin, Jacobin (2016); Upstream, Worker Cooperatives Pt. 2 (2018).*
Image: *Inside an Eroski supermarket in Arrasate-Mondragón. Markel Redondo/The Guardian.*

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Cooperation Jackson

Another influential project is Cooperation Jackson, which is based in the US city of Jackson, Mississippi.

Since its founding in 2014, Cooperation Jackson has gained control over 45 properties and established a range of cooperatives, including farms and small-scale manufacturing.

While much smaller than Mondragon, Cooperation Jackson is making a more explicit attempt to situate their cooperatives within a process of socialist construction.

Source: *Ali Akuno, Monthly Review (2025).* ***Image:*** *Cooperation Jackson.*

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The Jackson-Kush Plan

Cooperation Jackson is an effort to develop the third plank of a broader strategy for building dual power in Jackson called the Jackson-Kush Plan. The strategy has three core aspects:

→ **Build independent people's assemblies** to autonomously address the various needs of the people

→ **Developing independent electoral vehicles** to wield state power and enact non-reformist reforms

→ **Employ tools of the solidarity economy** to socialise the means of production



While this is articulating an ambition to build commune-like structures as part of a socialist process, there are some big hurdles ahead →

*Source: Ali Akuno, Monthly Review (2025). **Image:** Cooperation Jackson.*



As seen in parts 2–5 of this series, communes are important cells of socialism pushing transformation forwards. However, this can only occur at the necessary scale, and progress can only be defended, if they are situated within a parallel process of contesting and transforming the state.

So long as Cooperation Jackson does not develop a more meaningful strategy for contesting state power (locally and nationally) beyond narrow policy wins, its potential will be diluted by the pressures of capitalism.

Image: *Leo Ramirez, Getty Images.*



The history of the commune form reveals that building socialism is not just a matter of winning the state, but having non-state structures that give wide sections of the working class direct experience in controlling and democratically planning society.

However, communal projects cannot sidestep the necessity of confronting and transforming the state. If they do, they risk being isolated projects that remain within the cracks of the status quo, rather than bases of power from which to challenge capitalism and imperialism.

Image: *"There's no revolutionary movement without revolutionary theory". MST, Filipe Augusto Peres.*