

specter is haunting American politics—the specter of #MAGACommunism. In recent weeks, the hashtag has trended on Twitter, leaving most observers baffled: What in God’s name could Donald Trump’s movement ever have in common with communism? Is this a sarcastic take on America’s surreal politics?

Much of its appeal comes from its irreverent combination of seeming opposites. The memes that have proliferated under the hashtag—such as one showing Trump holding Mao’s Little Red Book—have a ludic quality recalling the spirit of the Trump 2016 campaign. But MAGA communism isn’t a mere joke. Indeed, some powerful actors in American society are taking it seriously, as shown by Google’s decision to affix a warning to search results related to the hashtag.

It’s unclear exactly who coined the hashtag, but it was popularized by Haz Al-Din, the brain behind Infrared, a self-described Marxist-Leninist YouTube channel—and beginning in early September, it spread on Twitter, in large part thanks to Jackson Hinkle, a popular communist commentator.

Al-Din is a gifted speaker—or “debate bro,” in the parlance of internet politics—who is capable of discussing heavyweight political theory in an informal, jocular manner. It’s enough to listen to one of his videos, or to read one of his dense Substack posts, to realize that Al-Din is dead serious about #MAGACommunism—that is, about the notion, which most people would find preposterous, that communists in America should support the MAGA movement.

The premise of Al-Din’s argument is that Trump fundamentally and irreversibly changed American politics—for the better, if one believes in class struggle. Before 2016, the political landscape in the United States was confined to two choices—Democrat or Republican—that were situated along different points of a narrow establishment continuum. Anyone who didn’t pledge allegiance to the status quo (including communists) was relegated to the margins of the political system—if not regarded as an enemy of the state.

With Trump all this changed. For the first time in a long time, a mass movement emerged that situated itself outside of the status quo—against the status quo, in fact. “This means that radical political distinctions, rather than simple differences of opinion, are now possible, even in the realm of our democratic state. This is the beauty of the MAGA movement,” says Al-Din in one video.

In this sense, he notes, the specific political orientation that has hitherto characterized the MAGA movement—which is clearly anything but communist and is, in fact, vehemently anti-communist—is of secondary importance. What matters is that MAGA reintroduces class struggle to American politics—not only because the MAGA movement draws its support base mainly from the working class, but “because class struggle in politics, as Lenin pointed out, means the introduction of Clausewitzian enmity in politics.”

This, says Al-Din, means recognizing that “the primary contradiction in American politics is between MAGA and the status quo. ... Partisanship has made its definite return in the United States solely in the MAGA movement, which has again reintroduced real political enmity and distinction to the belly of the globalist beast itself.” The point is not what Trump says, but what he means to people. And when people fly the Trump flag, what they’re saying is: “Fuck the World Economic Forum, fuck Big Tech, fuck Big Pharma, fuck the status quo.”

American communists, Al-Din argues, are therefore faced with a stark choice: They can either remain within the safe space of ideologically consistent but politically irrelevant echo chambers, or they can choose to engage with the real political contradictions of contemporary America. They can join leftists in demonizing MAGA supporters as inherently racist, xenophobic, and so on, which effectively means siding with the status quo, or they can sacrifice ideological purity and side with the only mass working-class and anti-establishment movement that currently exists in America. There is no middle path.

This, of course, doesn’t mean that communists should passively accept whatever ideological orientation MAGA happens to have at the moment. On the contrary, a crucial point of Al-Din’s argument is that MAGA shouldn’t be viewed as a coherent ideology, but as a symbol of anti-elite struggle that remains open to the construction of a wide range of political identities.

In this sense, MAGA should be seen as something that began with Trump and is still associated with him—but that has the potential of taking on a life of its own, having become the host of every actual counter-hegemonic ideological tendency within the United States.

MAGA, in this account, is not a monolith but a terrain of contestation. Indeed, #MAGACommunism arises out of an awareness that the MAGA movement is at a crossroads. It represents “an alternate timeline for America. Which alternate timeline is an open question.” The populist energies that have gathered under its banner may merely become another instrument of elite-driven imperialism, as hawks weaponize anti-communism to promote war against China and Russia. The #MAGACommunism meme should therefore be understood as an attempt to salvage—and, indeed, strengthen—the working-class, anti-establishment, and anti-imperialist elements of the movement.

It’s safe to say the prospect of socialist ideas spreading among American workers is not one the country’s ruling classes look upon favorably. But the advocates of #MAGACommunism hope to make communism appealing to ordinary working-class people by decoupling it from the toxic ideology of leftism. Whereas the latter has turned into a fanatical and anti-popular ideology that looks down upon the masses, and despises everything most people hold dear—nation, family, tradition—#MAGACommunists claim to be reclaiming a revolutionary legacy rooted in a deep patriotic respect for the national, familial, and cultural premises that define a people.

“Socialism with American characteristics,” as they call it, does not aim to change all private-property relations, let alone abolish all private property. On the contrary, it is one that aims to overthrow the monopolists, the bankers, Big Pharma, Big Agriculture, Big Tech and others, in order to allow people have *more* things, not less.

Beyond the playful memes, however, it isn't always clear what the movement aims to do. Does it seek to unite people from the far left and far right under the same anti-elite umbrella, without challenging the ideologies of the various factions, as Hinkle would appear to be suggesting? Or does it aim to transcend existing ideologies and the left-right political spectrum altogether to create a new “populist” working class-elites spectrum, as Al-Din seems to imply?

If the goal is a hard-left-hard-right union, the problem is that there are clearly lines that have to be drawn in terms of who you ally yourself with. Moreover, the risk is that the movement ends up being perceived as a “sum of extremes” that alienates moderate voters both on the left and on the right, thus resulting in a whole that is less than the sum of the parts.

And if the goal is to transcend the left-right spectrum altogether, #MAGACommunists are bound to discover that the dichotomy is harder to kill than they think, especially by resorting to a term (communism) that is arguably impossible to extricate from that dichotomy. Moreover, so-called culture-war issues—from abortion to race—have become part and parcel of contemporary politics, and can't be wished away in the name of working-class unity.

Ultimately, one can't help but feel that we are still stuck in a situation in which the old political spectrum has become zombified, but a new one is yet to be born. #MAGACommunism may prove to be nothing more than a meme, but it shows the hunger that exists for a less stultifying politics.



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