

# Politics as Consumer Item in Leftism - Postliterate - Medium

By Postliterate

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The political left is haunted by the fact that it has generated little of new, fundamental ideas. Socially progressive ideas trek along, but for genuinely revolutionary ideas or tactics, the left remains stuck in the 20th century. All of its debates, its aesthetics, its theory, and its organizational proposals are the same debates, aesthetics, theory, and organizational proposals that defined 20th century leftist movements.

The general reason for this could be easily blamed as a consequence of culture death under capitalism. Without a new, we have no way to distinguish nor even properly define the old. Thus the old becomes a xeroxed accessory, torn from its context and placed in an alien and insulated state (and given a price tag as well.)

“Walk around the British Museum, where you see objects torn from their lifeworlds and assembled as if on the deck of some Predator spacecraft, and you have a powerful image of this process at work. In the conversion of practices and rituals into merely aesthetic objects, the beliefs of previous cultures are objectively ironized, transformed into artifacts.” — Mark Fisher

One of the most acute manifestations of this process in leftist politics, in my opinion, is the conversion of ideas into “ideologies.” “Ideology” should have a negative connotation, denoting adherence to a close-minded program, or in Marxian terminology, denoting propaganda disseminated in class society to further the existence of the dominant order. Yet in leftist discourse, every person is expected to adhere to one. On any online leftist space, you are supposed to choose your “ideology,” and the consequence of this alone generates infighting, before any discussion has occurred.

The general trend here is away from real content and into pure form. Political philosophy is no longer simply the spread of ideas, holding potentially liberatory momentum or not, but the spread of containers which once held ideas. The reason for this shift is that “ideologies” can be shopped for like groceries, tried on like clothing, worn like a brand-name, and traded like baseball cards; raw ideas cannot. This illustrates the power of capital’s exchange-logic at work, converting all into illusory values. This, of course, can also be paralleled with the general trend of our spectacle-commodity economy to generate and exonerate pure appearance over real form (George Bush’s smile could capture the spirit of the nation from the television, regardless of his actual self, etc.)

However, it’s not enough to just blame capital. We need to remember that these 20th century leftist movements, no matter how numerous or admirable, did not bring any socialist utopias that lasted into the 21st century. While it may reasonably take any major revolutionary project like socialism centuries to succeed, to what extent should things be fixed and to what extent are material conditions different now?

What I can answer (within the scope of this short blogpost) is that, like the Anarchist FAQ, we should disown the idea of “ideologies.” Instead, we should trade actual *ideas*. This does not mean all labels should be thrown out, making the ideal leftist some kind of centrist who refuses to accept a label, but that labels should be subordinated to ideas, and not vice versa.

I also do not particularly ask that leftists sit around and brainstorm brand new revolutionary ideas before they do anything. The answers are all already there; there is more than enough theory already in existence to allow us to succeed. Rather, we need to sever ties with the 20th century — to stop imitating it and make something new.

Furthermore, we need to understand how things are different now than they were in the 20th century. The solidification of capitalist realism following the 2008 crisis, the war on terror, the election of Trump, etc. have all generated conditions that are unique. Many today will simply deny that things are different enough than they were in Lenin’s time to warrant new tactics, or that Lenin’s programs were at all unsuccessful enough to warrant new tactics. However, both are true.

Marxism should not die, but it will if leftist politics remains static. The arrogant remark the IMT made regarding Mark Fisher’s *Capitalist Realism*:

“If you want genuinely revolutionary socialist ideas, stick to Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Trotsky”

represents the very kind of regressive mentality that must be overcome. The innovations of the Frankfurt School, of the SI, of Fisher and Jameson, and many others, even if they are not necessarily correct on all accounts, represent the very idea of innovation in Marxism which has to occur. The cries of “revisionism” are the very cries of those who do not realize their own Marxism-Leninism, or their own Maoism, is itself an innovation and a progression from Marx. Their clutching to ideas tied to conditions over 100 years old now, is merely a purity fetish.