Marxists' Apartment A Microcosm Of Why Marxism Doesn't Work

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AMHERST, MA—The filthy, disorganized apartment shared by three members of the Amherst College Marxist Society is a microcosm of why the social and economic utopia described in the writings of Karl Marx will never come to fruition, sources reported Monday.

Marxists Kirk Dorff and Josh Foyle.

"The history of society is the inexorable history of class struggle," said sixth-year undergraduate Kirk Dorff, 23, resting his feet on a coffee table cluttered with unpaid bills, crusted cereal bowls, and bongwater-stained socialist pamphlets. "The stage is set for the final struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, the true productive class. We're well aware of that here at 514 W. Elm Street, unlike other apartments on this supposedly intellectual campus."

Upon moving in together at the beginning of the fall 2001 semester, Dorff, Josh Foyle, and Tom Eaves sat down and devised an egalitarian system for harmonious living. Each individual roommate would be assigned a task, which he would be required to carry out on a predetermined day of the week. A bulletin board in the kitchen was chosen as the spot for household announcements, and to track reimbursements for common goods like toothpaste and toilet paper.

"We were creating an exciting new model for living," said Dorff, stubbing his cigarette into an ashtray that had not been emptied in six days. "It was like we were dismantling the apparatus of the state right within our own living space."

Despite the roommates' optimism, the system began to break down soon after its establishment. To settle disputes, the roommates held weekly meetings of the "Committee of Three."

"I brought up that I thought it was total bullshit that I'm, like, the only one who ever cooks around here, yet I have to do the dishes, too," said Foyle, unaware of just how much the apartment underscores the infeasibility of scientific socialism as outlined in *Das Kapital*. "So we decided that if I cook, someone else has to do the dishes. We were going to rotate bathroom-cleaning duty, but then Kirk kept skipping his week, so we had to give him the duty of taking out the garbage instead. But now he has a class on Tuesday nights, so we switched that with the mopping."

After weeks of complaining that he was the only one who knew how to clean "halfway decent," Foyle began scaling back his efforts, mirroring the sort of production problems experienced in the USSR and other Soviet bloc nations.

At an Oct. 7 meeting of the Committee of Three, more duties and a point system were added. Two months later, however, the duty chart is all but forgotten and the shopping list is several pages long.

Dishes and seminal Marxist tracts pile up in the kitchen sink.

The roommates have also tried to implement a food-sharing system, with similarly poor results. The dream of equal distribution of shared goods quickly gave way to pilferage, misallocation, and hoarding.

"I bought the peanut butter the first four times, and this Organic Farms shit isn't cheap," Eaves said. "So ever since, I've been keeping it in my dresser drawer. If Kirk wants to make himself a sandwich, he can run to the corner store and buy some Jif."

Another failed experiment involves the cigarettes bought collectively. Disagreements constantly arose over who smoked more than his fair share of the group's supply of American Spirit Blues, and the roommates now hide individually purchased packs from each other—especially late at night when shortages are frequent.

The situation is familiar to Donald Browning, author of *Das Kouch: A History Of College Marxism, 1970-1998*.

"When workers willfully become less productive, the economy of the household suffers," Browning said. "But in a society where a range of ability naturally exists, someone is bound to object to picking up the slack for others and end up getting all pissy, like Josh does."

According to Browning, the group's lack of productivity pervades their lives, with roommates encouraging each other to skip class or work to sit on the couch smoking pot and talking politics.

"A spirit of free-market competition in the house would likely result in better incomes or better grades," Browning said. "Then, instead of being hated and ostracized by the world at large as socialist countries usually are, they could maintain effective diplomacy with their landlord, their parents, and Kirk's boss who cut back his hours at Shaman Drum Books."

The lack of funds and the resulting scarcity breeds not only discontent but also corruption. Although collectivism only works when all parties contribute to the fullest extent, Foyle hid the existence of a $245 paycheck from roommates so he would not have to pay his back rent, in essence refusing to participate in the forced voluntary taxation that is key to socialism. Even worse, Dorff, who is entrusted with bill collection and payment, recently pocketed $30, a theft he claimed was "for the heating bill" but was put toward buying drinks later that night.

"As is human nature, power tends to corrupt even the noblest of men," Browning said. "The more power the collective has over the lives of the individuals, as is the case in this household, the more he who is in charge of distribution has to gain by being unscrupulous. These Marxists will soon realize they overestimated how much control they would like 514 W. Elm as an entity to have."