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and Engels. I would not describe myself as anti-Marxist. However, it has repeatedly led to bad ends. Since it was meant to be a "praxis," a unity of theory and practice, this repeated failure, this constant tendency toward dreadful results, shows that there must be some basic problems with it. One such problem is its consistent centralism, even at its most democratic. In this area, anarchism has been right in its advocacy of a decentralized federalism, what today has been called "horizontalism." This is one of the great strengths of anarchism.

References

Marx, Karl (1974). *Political Writings Vol. I: The Revolutions of 1848*. (David Fernbach, ed.). NY: Vintage Books/Random House.

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set up centralist rule through appointed prefects, as "simply a tool of reaction." (1974, p. 329) Instead Engels wrote that he would prefer a federalist approach similar to that of the U.S. (at a time when the U.S. was a lot more decentralized than today).

> "It must be noted today that this passage is based on a misunderstanding," he wrote. "At that time…it was considered an established fact that the centralized administrative machine in France was introduced by the Great Revolution…However, it is now known that during the entire revolution, up to 18 Brumaire [Napoleon's coup], the whole administration of the departments, districts and municipalities consisted of authorities elected by the local population, and that the authorities acted with complete freedom within the limits of the general state legislation. This provincial and local self-government, resembling the American, became the strongest instrument of the revolution…But…local and provincial self-government does not necessarily contradict political and national centralization…." (1974, p. 329)

This is far better than the original advocacy of "the strictest centralization." But, among other things, it still focuses on elected officials and says nothing at all about localized direct democracy. The last sentence is puzzling. He may simply mean "unification" when he writes "centralization," meaning that local self-government would not prevent overcoming the feudal divisions of old Germany, creating a unified nation, which was needed at the time. But the statement is ambiguous at best. In any case, this footnote (and a few other comments) by Engels had little effect on the overall pro-centralism of the Marxist movement.

Marxism has made many contributions and anarchists have much to learn from it — especially from the work of Marx

After the failed 1848 German revolution, Marx and Engels decided that it was a mistake to expect the liberals to create a democratic republic. They proposed an alternate strategy in their 1850 Address of the Central Committee to the Communist League. They called this strategy "permanent revolution." Without going into all of what this meant to them, it included the idea that, during a revolution, the workers should organize revolutionary councils or clubs to watch over the bourgeois-democratic governments. The "workers' councils" should try to push them further, to win over the whole of the working class and the oppressed, and to overthrow the capitalist state in a socialist revolution. This strategy could have been interpreted in a decentralist fashion, and is not far from what Bakunin and Kropotkin were to advocate. But Marx and Engels gave it a centralizing form.

> "The [pro-capitalist] democrats will either work directly toward a federated republic, or at least…they will attempt to paralyze the central government by granting the municipalities and provinces the greatest possible autonomy and independence. In opposition to this plan, the workers must not only strive for the one and indivisible German republic, but also…for the most decisive centralization of power in the hands of the state authority… As in France in 1793, it is the task of the genuinely revolutionary party in Germany to carry through the strictest centralization." (1974, p. 328–329)

However, 35 years later, and after the experience of the Paris Commune, Engels republished this Address but added a footnote to precisely this passage. He wrote that he and Marx had been wrong to accept the standard view of the French revolution as having been centralizing. The revolution had had a great deal of federalist looseness. It was only Napoleon who

The Problem of Marxist Centralism

There is a paradox about Marxism. Its goals are similar to anarchism: a classless, cooperative, society, self-managed by the freely associated producers, with the replacement of alienated labor by craft-like creativity, and the replacement of the state by the democratic self-organization of the people. Yet in practice Marxism has resulted in the Social Democratic support of Western imperialism and in the creation of "Communist" totalitarian state capitalisms. Why is this?

One reason is Marxism's commitment to "centralism" from its very beginning in the work of Marx and Engels. In the programmatic part of the Manifesto of the Communist Party (the end of Section II), they wrote that the goal of the working class should be *"to centralize all instruments of production in the hands of the state…" (1974, p. 86) This would include measures such as "5. Centralization of credit in the hands of the state… 6. Centralization of the means of communication and transportation in the hands of the state. 7. Extension of factories and instruments of production owned by the state… 8. Equal liability of all to labor. Establishment of industrial armies… When…all production has been concentrated in the hands of a vast association of the whole nation, the public power will lose its political character…."* (1974, p. 87)

That is, they assumed there would no longer be a state — a specialized, bureaucratic, coercive body standing above the rest of society. However, there would be a centralized "vast association." Presumably such a centralized national association would be run by a few people at the center — which is what makes it centralized. Everybody else would be in those industrial armies. What if the masses in the industrial armies resented the few central planners and rebelled against them? The central planners would need coercive power to keep the system working. In other words, they would need a state, whatever Marx and Engels wanted.

After the 1871 rebellion of the Paris Commune, Marx and Engels changed their attitude toward the state. The old bourgeois state of the capitalists could not be simply taken over by the workers in order to carry out the above program, they wrote. The state of the capitalists would have to be destroyed. A new association would have to be put in its place, something like the Paris Commune, which was nonbureaucratic and radically democratic. Sometimes they called such a Commune-like structure a "state" and sometimes they denied that it was a "state."

But this does not mean that they rejected centralization. Some people read Marx's The Civil War in France (his writings on the Commune) as decentralist. The Revisionist (reformist) Bernstein said that Marx's views on the Commune were federalist, similar to the views of Proudhon (Bernstein was trying to discredit Marx as almost an anarchist). Lenin insisted that Marx was still a centralist. Actually Marx's writing on the Commune did not deal with the issue of centralism or decentralism at all.

Marx's conclusions from the Paris Commune was that a Commune-like association should have no standing army but have a popular militia, no appointed police force, just elected officials, no full-time, long-term representatives with big salaries, but recallable delegates paid the wages of ordinary workers. These ideas are good, but at most they point to a better, more-democratic, but still centralized, representative democracy. It is as if the local people had nothing to do but to elect or recall their representatives, who would be political for them. The proposals do not deal with the need for local, face-to-face, directly-democratic, councils, in neighborhoods or workplaces. If the people were not to be passive spectators at their own revolution, if they were to manage their own lives, they had to set up such self-governing councils (as both Bakunin and Kropotkin commented). In fact such neighborhood assemblies were created during the Paris Commune (as they had been during the French revolution of 1789). They included almost daily meetings to make decisions, to organize the community,

and to organize the fight against the counterrevolution. But there is nothing of this in Marx's writing.

Similarly, in Lenin's most libertarian work, State and Revolution, he reviews Marx's conclusions on the Paris Commune but says nothing about local democracy. He compares the soviets (elected councils) of the ongoing Russian revolution to the Commune. But he does not compare the factory councils of the Russian revolution with the neighborhood assemblies of the Commune. Yet factory councils spread throughout the Russian empire, creating self-management in industry. The anarchists championed them, as did a minority of Bolsheviks, but Lenin and most of his followers worked to undermine and destroy them. Naturally, this was one reason the soviets became lifeless agents of an eventual one-party dictatorship.

Unlike Lenin, Marx had always been a committed democrat, a leader of the most extreme wing of the 19th century German democratic movement. He was the editor of the most radical democratic newspaper of Germany. His paper fiercely criticized the moderate democrats for their capitulation to the monarchist regime. But even extreme German democrats were centralists. They fought against Germany's dismemberment into dukedoms and little kingdoms, each with its own court, money system, and tolls on roads. They wanted a unified republic, ruled by one central elected government. They were impressed by the history of the French revolution, in which the most revolutionary bourgeois forces were the centralizing Jacobins (they thought). This was the opposite of the U.S. revolution. In the U.S., it was the most conservative forces (the Hamiltonian "Federalists") who were centralizers, and it was the more popular, democratic, forces (the Jeffersonians) who were for a more decentralized federation. Jefferson greatly admired the New England town councils and wished he could import them into the rest of the country. (This decentralist political trend was to fail with the growth of the national state, until it was only used as a defense of racial segregation.)